



*Life Stories  
Retold*

*H. G.  
WELLS*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



H. G. WELLS

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*(Howard Coster)*

H. G. WELLS

From a portrait taken about 1940



# H. G. WELLS

EXPERIMENT IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Abridged and edited by*  
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## CHAPTER I

### 47 HIGH STREET, BROMLEY, KENT

THIS brain of mine came into existence in a needy shabby home in a little town called Bromley in Kent, which has since become a suburb of London. I have no recollection of any beginning at all. I have some early memories, but they are not arranged in any time order. I will do my best, however, to recall the conditions amidst which my childish head got its early lessons in living. They seem to me now quite dreadful conditions, but at the time it was the only conceivable world.

It was then the flaxen head of a podgy little boy with a snub nose and a long upper lip, and along his flaxen hair was a curl which was finally abolished at his own urgent request. Early photographs record short white socks, bare arms and legs, a petticoat, ribbon bows on the shoulders, and a scowl. That must have been gala costume. I do not remember exactly what everyday clothes I wore until I was getting to be a fairly big boy. I seem to recall a sort of pinafore for everyday use very like what small boys still wear in France, except that it was brown instead of black.

The house in which this little boy ran about, clattering up and down the uncarpeted stairs, bawling—family tradition insists on the bawling—and investigating existence, deserves description. It was one of a row of badly built houses upon a narrow section of the High Street. In front upon the ground floor was the shop, filled with crockery, china and glassware and, a special line of goods, cricket bats, balls, stumps, nets and other cricket material. Behind the shop was an extremely small room, the 'parlour', with a fireplace, and glass-door



upon the shop and a window upon the yard behind. A narrow staircase with a twist in it led downstairs to a completely underground kitchen, lit by a window which derived its light from a grating on the street level, and a bricked scullery, which, since the house was poised on a bank, opened into the yard at the ground level below. In the scullery was a small fireplace, a copper boiler for washing, a provision cupboard, a bread pan, a beer cask, a pump delivering water from a well into a stone sink, and space for coal, our only space for coal, beneath the wooden stairs. This 'coal cellar' held about a ton of coal, and when the supply was renewed it had to be carried in sacks through the shop and 'parlour' and down the staircase by men who were apt to drop small particles of coal along the route.

The yard was perhaps thirty by forty feet square. In it was a brick dustbin (cleared at rare intervals via the shop), a fairly open and spacious receptacle. In this a small boy could find among the ashes such objects of interest as egg-shells, useful tins and boxes. The ashes could be rearranged to suggest mountain scenery. There was a boundary wall, separating us from the much larger yard and sheds of Mr Covell the butcher, in which pigs, sheep and horned cattle were harboured violently, and protested plaintively through the night before they were slaughtered. Beyond it was Bromley Church and its old graveyard, full then of healthy trees and ruinous tombs where my elder sister lay buried.

Our yard was half bricked and half bare earth, and an open cement gutter brought the waste waters of the sink to a soak-away in the middle of the space. Thence, no doubt, soap-suds and cabbage water, seeped away to mingle with the waters of the well from which the pump drew our supply. Between the scullery and the neighbour's wall was a narrow passage covered over, and in this my father piled the red earthenware jars and pans,



the jam-pots and so forth, which bulk so large in the stock of a crockery dealer.

I 'played' a lot in this yard and learnt its every detail, because there was no other open-air space within easy reach of a very small boy to play in. Its effect of smallness was enhanced by the erections in the neighbours' yards on either side. On one hand was the yard of Mr Munday, the haberdasher, who had put up a greenhouse and cultivated mushrooms, to nourish which his boys collected horse-droppings from the High Street in a small wooden truck; and on the other, Mr Cooper, the tailor, had built out a workroom in which two or three tailors sat and sewed. The unbricked part of our yard had a small flower-bed in which my father had planted a bush. It flowered reluctantly, and most things grew reluctantly in that bed. But my father was a gardener of some resolution and, against the back of the house, rooting in a hole in the brickwork, he had persuaded a grape-vine not only to grow, but to flourish. When I was ten, he fell from a combination of short ladder, table and kitchen steps on which he had mounted to prune the shoots of this vine, and broke his leg. But of that very important event I will tell a little later.

I dwell rather upon the particulars about this yard, because it was a large part of my little world in those days. I lived mostly in it and in the scullery and underground kitchen. We were much too poor to have a servant, and it was more than my mother could do to keep fires going upstairs. Above the ground floor were a back bedroom occupied by my mother and a front room occupied by my father, and above this again was a room, the boys' bedroom (there were three of us) and a back attic filled with dusty crockery stock. But there was stock everywhere; pots and pans invaded the kitchen, under the dresser and under the ironing board; bats and stumps crept into the 'parlour'. The furniture of this home



had all been acquired second-hand at sales ; furniture shops that catered for democracy had still to appear in the middle nineteenth century ; an aristocratic but battered bookcase despised a sofa from some house-keeper's room ; the chairs were massive but moody ; the wooden bedsteads had exhausted feather mattresses and grey sheets—for there had to be economy over the washing bills—and there was not a scrap of carpet or oil-cloth in the house that had not lived a full life of usefulness before it came into our household. Everything was frayed, discoloured and patched. But we had no end of oil lamps because they came out of (and went back into) stock. (My father also dealt in lamp-wicks, oil and paraffin.)

We lived, as I have said, mostly downstairs and underground, more particularly in the winter. We went upstairs to bed. About upstairs I have to add a further particular. The house was infested with bugs. They harboured in the wooden bedsteads and lurked between the layers of wallpaper that peeled from the walls. Slain they avenge themselves by a peculiar disagreeable smell. That mingles in my early recollections with the odour of paraffin, with which my father carried on an inconclusive war against them. Almost every part of my home had its own distinctive smell.

This was the queer home from which my two brothers and I were launched into what Sir James Jeans has very properly called this Mysterious Universe, to make what we could of it.

## CHAPTER II

### A BROKEN LEG AND SOME BOOKS AND PICTURES (1874)

My leg was broken for me when I was between seven and eight. Probably I am alive today and writing this autobiography instead of being a worn-out, dismissed and already dead shop assistant, because my leg was broken. The agent of good fortune was 'young Sutton', the grown-up son of the landlord of the Bell. I was playing outside the scoring tent in the cricket field and in all friendliness he picked me up and tossed me in the air. 'Whose little kid are you?' he said, and I wriggled, he missed his hold on me and I snapped my leg across a tent peg. A great fuss of being carried home; a painful setting—for they just set and strapped a broken leg tightly between splints in those days, and the knee and ankle swelled dreadfully—and then for some weeks I found myself enthroned on the sofa in the parlour as the most important thing in the house, consuming unheard-of jellies, fruits and chicken sent with endless apologies on behalf of her son by Mrs Sutton, and I could demand and have a fair chance of getting anything that came into my head, books, paper, pencils, and toys—and particularly books.

I had just taken to reading. I had just discovered the art of leaving my body to sit impassive in a crumpled-up attitude in a chair or sofa, while I wandered over the hills and far away in novel company and new scenes. And now my father went round nearly every day to the Literary Institute in Market Square and got one or two books for me, and Mrs Sutton sent some books, and there was always a fresh book to read. My world began to expand



very rapidly, and when presently I could put my foot to the ground, the reading habit had got me securely. Both my parents were doubtful of the healthiness of reading, and did their best to discourage this poring over books as soon as my leg was better.

I cannot recall now many of the titles of the books I read, I devoured them so fast, and the title and the author's name in those days seemed a mere inscription on the door to delay me in getting down to business. There was a work, in two volumes, upon the countries of the world, which I think must have been made of bound-up fortnightly parts. It was illustrated with woodcuts, and it took me to Tibet, China, the Rocky Mountains, the forests of Brazil, Siam and a score of other lands. I mingled with Red Indians and naked negroes ; I learnt about whaling and crossed the drift ice with Esquimaux. There was Wood's *Natural History*, also copiously illustrated and full of exciting and terrifying facts. I conceived a profound fear of the gorilla, of which there was a fearsome picture, which came out of the book at times after dark and followed me noiselessly about the house. The half landing was a favourite lurking-place for this terror. I passed it whistling but wary, and then ran for my life up the next flight. And I was glad to think that between the continental land masses of the world, which would have afforded an unbroken land passage for wolves from Russia and tigers from India, and this safe island on which I took my daily walks, stretched the English Channel. Turning over the pages of the *Natural History*, I perceived a curious relationship between cats and tigers and lions and so forth, and to a lesser degree between them and hyenas and dogs and bears, and curious early notions about evolution crept into my thoughts. Also I read the life of the Duke of Wellington and about the American Civil War, and began to fight campaigns and battles in my reveries. At home were the works of



Washington Irving and I became strangely familiar with Granada and Columbus and the Companions of Columbus. I do not remember that any story books figured during this first phase of reading. Either I have forgotten them or they did not come my way. Later on, however, Captain Mayne Reid, Fenimore Cooper and the Wild West generally, seized upon my imagination.

Now that I had arrived at knickerbockers and the reading of books, I was sent to a little private school in the High Street, Bromley, for boys between seven and fifteen. None of these boys came from bookish homes so that I had from the outset a queer relative wideness of outlook. I knew all sorts of things about lands and beasts and times of which they had never heard. So that I passed for an exceptionally bright and clever little boy and the schoolmaster would invoke 'Young Seven Years Old', to shame my elders. They were decent enough not to take revenge upon me. Among boys from more literate homes I should have had none of these outstanding advantages, but I took them naturally enough as a born superiority, and they made me rather exceptionally self-conceited and confident.

So at the age of seven (and, to be exact, three quarters), when I went up the High Street to Morley's school for the first time, a rather white-faced little boy in a pinafore and carrying a small green satchel for my books, I had already a wide wide world of snowy mountains, Arctic regions, tropical forests, prairies and deserts and high seas, cities and armies, Red Indians, negroes and island savages, gorillas, great carnivores, elephants, rhinoceroses and whales, about which I was prepared to talk freely.



### CHAPTER III

#### MR MORLEY'S COMMERCIAL ACADEMY

(1874-1880)

THIS march up the High Street to Mr Thomas Morley's Academy begins a new phase in the story of the brain that my father and his wife had launched into the world. Bromley Academy was a school in the ancient tradition, but the highest point of my schooling was to occur in the most modern and advanced of colleges then in existence, the science schools at South Kensington. It was a queer discontinuous series of educational processes through which my brain was passed, very characteristic of that time.

The new order of things that was appearing in the world when I was born, was already arousing a consciousness of the need for universal elementary education. It was being realized by the ruling classes that a nation with many illiterates would compete at a disadvantage against the foreigner. A condition of things in which everyone would read and write and do sums, dawned on the startled imagination of mankind. The British and the National Schools, which had existed for half a century, were organized into a state system under the Elementary Education Act of 1871 and supplemented by Board Schools. Bromley was served by a National School. That was all that the district possessed in the way of public education. It was the mere foundation of an education. It saw to the children up to the age of thirteen or even fourteen, and no further. Beyond that the locality had no public provision for technical education or the development of artistic or scientific ability whatever. But side by side with that nineteenth-century National



School under the Education Act, the old eighteenth-century order was still carrying on in Bromley, and the Academy of Mr Thomas Morley was a fairly well preserved specimen, only slightly modernized, of the departing order of things.

He had opened school for himself in 1849, having previously filled the post of teacher at an old-established school that closed down in that year. He was Scotch and his first prospectus laid stress on 'writing in both plain and ornamental style, Arithmetic logically, and History with special reference to Ancient Egypt'. Ancient Egypt, and indeed most of the History except lists of dates, had dropped from the school outlook long before I joined it, for even Bromley Academy moved a little with the times, but there was still great stress on copper-plate writing, long addition sums and book-keeping. Morley was a bald, spectacled man with a strawberry nose and ginger-grey whiskers, who considered it due to himself and us to wear a top hat, an ample frock-coat, and a white tie, and to carry himself with invariable dignity and make a frequent use of 'Sir'. Except for a certain assistance with the little ones from Mrs Morley, a stout lady in black silk and a gold chain, he ran the school alone. It was a single room built out over a kitchen; there were desks round the walls and two, of six places each, in the centre, with a stove between which warmed the place in winter. His bedroom window opened upon the schoolroom, and beneath it, in the corner of the room, was his desk, the great ink bottle from which the ink-wells were filled, the pile of slates and the incessant cane, with which he administered justice, either in sudden descents upon our backs and hindquarters, or after formal accusations, by smacks across the palm of the hand. He also hit us with his hands anywhere, and with books, rulers and anything else that came handy, and his invective and derision were terrific. Also we were made to



stand on the forms and hold out books and slates until our arms ached. And in this way he urged us—I suppose our numbers varied from twenty-five to thirty-five—along the path of learning that led in the more successful instances to the examinations, and then to jobs as clerks.

About half the boys were boarders drawn from London public houses or other homes unsuitable for growing youth. There were a few day-boarders from outlying farms, who took their dinner in the house. The rest were sons of poorish middle-class people in the town. We assembled at nine and went on to twelve and again from two to five, and between these hours, except when the windows were open in warm weather, the atmosphere grew steadily more thick and our mental operations more slow and confused.

The main impressions left upon my brain by that Academy are not impressions of a universe being made plain to me or of skills being acquired and elaborated, but of the moods of Mr Thomas Morley and their consequences. At times his attention was altogether distracted; he was remote upon his throne in the corner, and then we would relax from the tasks or exercises he had set us and indulge in activities of our own. We would talk and tell each other stories—I had a mind suitably equipped by my reading for boyish story telling and would go on interminably—draw on our slates, play marbles, noughts and crosses and suchlike games, turn out our pockets, swap things, indulge in pinching and punching matches, eat sweets, read penny dreadfuls, do anything, indeed, but the work in hand. Sometimes it would be whispered in the drowsy digestive first hour of the afternoon, 'Old Tommy's asleep', and we would watch him sink slowly and beautifully down and down into slumber, terminated by a snore and a start. If at last he got off to sleep completely, spectacles askew over his folded arms, a kind of silent wildness would come upon us. We would



stand up to make fantastic, insulting gestures, leave our places to creep noiselessly as far as we dared. He would awaken abruptly, inflict sudden punishment on some belated adventurer; and then would come a strenuous hour of work.

The spells of intensive teaching came irregularly, except for Friday afternoon, which was always spent in the breathless pursuit of arithmetic. There were also whole afternoons of 'book-keeping by double entry' upon sheets of paper, when we pursued imaginary goods and cash payments with pen and ruler and even red ink, to a final Profit and Loss Account and a Balance Sheet. We wrote in copy-books and he came, peering and directing, over our shoulders. There was only one way in which a pen might be held; it was a matter of supreme importance; there was only one angle at which writing might slope. I was disposed to be unorthodox in this respect, and my knuckles suffered.

When I left school at the age of thirteen, whatever else I had missed, I had certainly acquired the ability to use English with some precision and delicacy, even if the accent was a Cockney one, and I had quite as good a mathematical apparatus as most boys of the same age get at a public school nowadays. I had read about as much of Euclid as it was customary to read, made a fair start with trigonometry and was on the verge of the calculus. But most of the other stuff I got was bad.

My reading habit I developed at home and do not recall that Morley ever directed my attention to any book, unless it was some cheap school text-book used in my work. But at times he would get excited by his morning paper and then we would have a discourse on the geography of the North-West Frontier with an appeal to a decaying yellow map of Asia that hung on the wall, or we would follow the search for Livingstone by Stanley in Darkest Africa.



## CHAPTER IV

### MRS WELLS, HOUSEKEEPER AT UP PARK

(1880-1893)

I HAVE said that a great stroke of good fortune was the breaking of my leg when I was seven years old. Another almost as important was the breaking of my father's leg in 1877, which made the break-up of our home inevitable. He set himself to prune the grape-vine one Sunday morning in October, and, resolved to make a job of it and get at the highest shoots, he poised a ladder on a bench and fell heavily. We returned from church to find him lying in the yard groaning, and our neighbours, Mr Cooper and Mr Munday, helped to carry him upstairs. He had a compound fracture of the thigh bone.

Before the year was out it was plain that my father was going to be heavily lame for the rest of his life. This was the end of any serious cricket, any bowling to gentlemen, any school jobs as 'pro', or the like for him. All the supplementary income his cricket playing brought in was cut off by this accident which also involved much expense in doctoring. The lack of money at my home became acute.

Things were more difficult than ever, for two years. Bread and cheese for supper and half a herring each with our bread and butter at breakfast and a growing tendency for potatoes to dominate the hash or stew at midday in place of meat, were signs of retrenchment. Mr Morley's bill had gone unpaid for a year. Frank, who was earning £26 a year (and food and lodging), came home for a holiday and gave my mother half a sovereign to buy me a pair of boots (at which she wept). I was growing fast and growing very thin.

And then suddenly the heavens opened and a great light



shone on my mother, Mrs Sarah Wells. My mother had first met my father when they had been employed by Lady Fetherstonhaugh at a large house called Up Park, she as lady's maid and he as gardener. Lady Fetherstonhaugh had been dead some years and Miss Bullock, to whom my mother had been maid, either inherited or was given a life tenure of Up Park, with not very plentiful means to maintain it. She took the name of Fetherstonhaugh. Presently arose trouble with the servants and about the household expenses, and Miss Fetherstonhaugh's thoughts turned affectionately towards her faithful maid, between whom and herself there had always been a correspondence of good wishes and little gifts. My mother went to Up Park on a visit. There were earnest conversations. It was still possible for her to find employment. But was it right to leave Joe alone in our home, Atlas House? What would become of the boys? Frank's apprenticeship as a draper was already over and he was in a situation. Freddy's time as a draper's apprentice was up also. He could go out too. My five years of schooling were ending in special certificates in book-keeping and hope. The young birds were leaving the nest. Father could manage to live by himself for a bit. My mother became housekeeper at Up Park in 1880.

Now if this had not happened, I have no doubt I should have followed in the footsteps of Frank and Freddy and gone on living at home under my mother's care, while I went daily to some shop, some draper's shop, to which I was bound apprentice. This would have seemed so natural and necessary that I should not have resisted. I should have served my time and never had an idea of getting away from the shop until it was too late. But the dislocation that now occurred closed this easy path to frustration. I was awakened to the significance of a start in life from the outset, as my brothers had never been.



But before I tell of the series of starts in life that now began, I must say a little about my mother's achievements in housekeeping. Except that she was thoroughly honest, my mother was perhaps the worst housekeeper that was ever thought of. She had never had the slightest experience in housekeeping. She did not know how to plan work, control servants, buy stores or economize in any way. She did not know clearly what was wanted upstairs. She could not even add up her accounts with assurance and kept them for me to do for her. All this came to light. It dawned slowly upon Miss Fetherstonhaugh; it became clearly apparent to her agent, who came up periodically from Portsmouth, Sir William King; it was manifest from the first to the very competent, if totally illiterate, head housemaid Old Ann, who gave herself her own orders more and more. The kitchen, the laundry, the pantry, with varying kindliness, apprehended this inefficiency in the housekeeper's room. At length I think it dawned even upon my mother.

Not at first. She was frightened, perhaps, but resolute and she believed that with prayer and effort anything can be achieved. She knew at least how a housekeeper should look, and assumed a lace cap, lace apron, black silk dress and all the rest of it, and she knew how a housekeeper should drive down to the tradespeople in Petersfield and take a glass of sherry when the account was settled. The old worried look vanished from her face; she became rounder and pinker, she assumed a tranquil dignity. She contrived that we should have situations round about Up Park, and in our holidays and during phases of being out of a situation, we infested the house. My father came on a visit once or twice and at last in 1887 abandoned Atlas House altogether and settled down on an allowance she paid him, in a cottage at Nyewoods near Rogate Station about four miles away.

She held on to her position until 1893 and I think



Miss Fetherstonhaugh was very forbearing that my mother held on so long. Because among other things she grew deaf. She grew deafer and deafer and she would not admit her deafness, but guessed at what was said to her and made wild shots in reply. She was deteriorating mentally. Miss Fetherstonhaugh was a still older woman and evidently found dealing with her more and more tiresome. They were two deaf old women at cross purposes. The rather sentimental affection between them evaporated in mutual irritation.

On several occasions Sir William was 'very unpleasant' to my mother. Economy and still more economy was urged upon her and she felt that saving and carefulness was beneath the dignity of a country house. The original joy of being housekeeper at Up Park had long since passed away. She began to gossip rather unwisely, and it came to Miss Fetherstonhaugh's ears. I think that sealed her fate. My mother's downfall came, a month's notice and 'much unkindness', in January 1893. The fallen housekeeper, with all her boxes and possessions, was driven to Petersfield station on 16th February, 1893, and the hospitable refuge of Up Park was closed to her and her needy family for ever.

A poor little stunned woman she must have been then, on Petersfield platform, a little black figure in a large black bonnet curiously suggestive now of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. I can imagine her as she wound mournfully down the Petersfield road looking back with tears in her blue eyes, not quite clear about why it had all occurred in this fashion, though no doubt God had arranged it 'for some good purpose'.

Why had Miss Fetherstonhaugh been so unkind?

But luckily, during my mother's thirteen years' sway at Up Park and thanks largely to the reliefs and opportunity that came to me through that brief interval of good fortune in her life, I had been able to do all sorts of things.



I was now twenty-six and a married man with a household and I was in a position to arrange a home for her and prevent the family boat from sinking altogether. I had become a Bachelor of Science in the University of London and a successful university crammer and I had published a text-book—a cram book to be exact—on biology as it was understood by the University examiners. I had begun to write for the papers. I had acquired a certain gravity of bearing, a fair moustache and side whiskers. How these changes had come about and what had happened to my brain and outlook in the process, I will now go on to tell.

## CHAPTER V

### FIRST START IN LIFE—WINDSOR (SUMMER 1880)

My first start in life was rather hastily improvised. My mother had a second cousin, Thomas Pennicott, 'Uncle Tom' we called him, who had always been very much in the margin of her world. I think he had admired her and been perhaps helped by her when they were young folk at Midhurst. He was one of the witnesses to her marriage. He was a fat, round-faced, clean-shaven, black-haired man, illiterate, good humoured and shrewd. He had followed the ruling tendency in my mother's family to keep inns, and he had kept the Royal Oak opposite the South Western Railway Station at Windsor to such good effect, that he was able to buy and rebuild a riverside inn, called Surly Hall, much visited by the Eton boys, during the summer term. He built it as a gabled house and the gables were decorated with blue designs and mottoes glorifying Eton in the Latin tongue,



very elegant and correct. The boys rowed up in the afternoons and choked the bar and swarmed over the lawn, noisily consuming 'squashed flies' and other strangely named refreshments.

It was Uncle Tom's excellent custom to invite Sarah's boys for the holidays; it was not an invariable custom but it happened most years, and we had a thoroughly healthy and expansive three weeks or a month, hanging about his premises in an atmosphere faintly flavoured by sawdust and beer. My brother's times fell into the 'Royal Oak days, but my lot was to visit Surly Hall for the last three of my school years. There I learnt to punt, paddle and row, but the current was considered too swift for me to attempt swimming without anyone to teach me. I did not learn to swim until I was past thirty.

My uncle was a widower, but he had two grown-up daughters in their early twenties, Kate and Clara; they shared the duties of the one or two maids he also employed. They all found me a very amusing temporary younger brother. Kate was the serious sister, and she did very much to stimulate me to draw and read. There was a complete illustrated set of Dickens which I read in abundantly, and a lot of bound-up *Family Herald*s, in which I best remember a translation of *The Mysteries of Paris*, which seemed to me at the time the greatest romance in the world. All these young women encouraged me to talk, because I said such unexpected things.

But this is a mere glimpse of summer paradise on the way to my first start in life. My mother, I think I have made it clear, was, within her limits, a very determined little woman. Almost as unquestioning as her belief in God, was her belief in drapers. She thought that to wear a black coat and tie behind a counter was the best of all possible lots attainable by man—at any rate by man at our social level. She had bound my brother Frank, resisting weakly, to Mr Crowhurst in the Market Square,



Bromley, for five years and she had bound my brother Freddy to Mr Sparrowhawk of the Pavement for four, to obey those gentlemen as if they were parents and learn the whole art and mystery of drapery from them, and she was now making a very resolute attempt to determine my future in the same fashion. It did not dawn upon her that my queer gifts of drawing and expression were of any value at all. But as poor father was to be all alone in the old home now, a Bromley shop was no longer a suitable soil in which to place me in order to grow up the perfect draper. She did not like to send me away where there was no one to look after me, for she knew there are dangers that waylay the young who are not supervised. So she found a hasty solution to her problem by sending me on trial, with a view to apprenticeship, to Messrs Rodgers and Denyer of Windsor, opposite the Castle. There my morals would be under the observation of Surly Hall. And from Messrs Rodgers and Denyer I got my first impressions of the intensely undesirable life for which she designed me. I had no idea of what I was in for. I went to my fate as I was told, unquestioningly, as my brothers had done before me.

I am told that, for many poor boys, leaving school and going into employment about thirteen or fourteen is a very exhilarating experience. But that is because they get pay, freedom in the evening and on Sundays, and more food. And they are released from the irksomeness of lessons and school tasks. But I had rather liked lessons and school tasks and drapers' apprentices did not get pay. An immense fuss, entirely unjustifiable, was made about the valuable trade apprentices were going to learn, and in the past the parents of the victim, if he 'lived in', usually paid a premium of forty or fifty pounds or so. I knew that the new start meant a farewell to many childish things. I had seen both my brothers pass into servitude, and I can still remember my brother Freddy



having a last game of 'marble runs' with toy bricks on the tilted kitchen table, a game of which he was particularly fond, before he submitted to the yoke of Mr Sparrowhawk and began that ritual of stock-keeping, putting things away, tidying things up, bending over the counter, being attentive and measuring off, that lasted thereafter for forty-odd years of his life. He knew what he was going to, did my brother Fred; and that game was played with sacrificial solemnity. 'I enjoyed that game', said Freddy, who has always displayed a certain gentle stoicism. 'It's supper time, Bert. . . . Let's put the things away.'

Now it was my turn to put the things away, put the books away, give up drawing and painting and every sort of free delight, stop writing stories and imitations of *Punch*, give up all vain hopes and dreams, and serve an employer.

I hated this place into which I had been put from the outset, but I was far too childish, as yet, to make any real resistance to the closing in of the prison about me. But I would not, I could not, give myself satisfactorily to this strange restricted life. It was just by the luck of that incapacity that the prison rejected me.

I was set down from Uncle Pennicott's dog-cart, with a small portmanteau containing all my earthly goods, at the side door of the establishment of Messrs Rodgers and Denyer, I was taken up a narrow staircase to the men's dormitory, in which were eight or ten beds and four miserable wash-hand stands, and I was shown a dismal little sitting-room with a ground glass window opening on a blank wall, in which the apprentices and assistants might 'sit' of an evening, and then I was conducted downstairs to an underground dining-room, lit by naked gas-jets and furnished with two long tables covered with American cloth, where the eating was to be done. Then I was introduced to the shop and particularly to the cash



desk, where it had been arranged for the first year of my apprenticeship that I was to sit on a tall stool and receive money, give change, enter the amount on a sheet and stamp receipts. I was further instructed in a ritual of dusting and window cleaning. I was to come down at half past seven in the morning, I learnt, to dust, clean windows, eat a bread-and-butter breakfast at half past eight, prepare my cash sheet and so to the routine of the day. I had to add up my cash at the end of the day, count the money in the till, make sheet and cash agree, help to sweep out the shop, and so escape at half past seven or eight to drink the delights of freedom until ten, when I had to be in. Lights out at half past ten. And this was to go on day after day—for ever it seemed to me—with an early closing day once a week at five, and Sunday free.

I did not rise to these demands upon me. My mind withdrew itself from my duties. I did my utmost to go on living within myself and leave my duties to do themselves. My disposition to reverie increased. I dusted abominably; whenever I could manage it I did not dust at all. I smuggled books into my desk or did algebraic problems from my battered Todhunter's *Larger Algebra*; I gave change absent-mindedly and usually I gave inaccurate change, and I entered wrong figures on the cash sheet out of sheer slovenliness.

The one bright moment during the day was when the Guards' fifes and drums went past the shop and up to the Castle. These fifes and drums swirled me away campaigning again. Dispatch riders came headlong from dreamland, taking no denial from the shopwalker. 'Is General Bert Wells here? The Prussians have landed!'

I obeyed, I realize, all the impulses of a fear of being closed in during that first phase of servitude. I would abandon my desk to sneak down into the warehouse, where I spent a great deal of time seated in a convenient



place of reflection, reading. Or I just stood about down there behind stacks of unpacked bales.

As the afternoon dragged on, the hour of reckoning when the cash sheet was added up drew near. It never by any chance corresponded with the money in the till. There had to be a checking of bills, a scrutiny of figures. Wrong sums had been set down. The adding had been wild work. At first the total error would be anything—more or less. After some weeks it became constantly a shortage. The booking clerk, and one of the partners who did the business correspondence and supervised things, would stay late to wrestle with the problem. They were impatient and reproachful. I had to stay too, profoundly apathetic. Either I was giving change in excess, or in some way the money was leaking away. I did not care a rap. I had always hated money sums and long additions and now I detested them. I just wanted to get out of that shop before it was ten o'clock and time to return to the house. I did not realize the dreadful suspicions that were gathering above my head, nor the temptation my inaccuracies were offering to anyone who had access to my desk while I was at meals or otherwise absent. Nobody thought of that, unless perhaps it was the booking clerk.

Every early closing night, every Sunday, at every opportunity I had, I went off to Surly Hall and took refuge with my cousins. I went with joy and returned with heavy feet. I did not want to talk about business there and when they asked me how I was getting on I said 'Oh, all right', and turned the talk to more agreeable topics. I did the long two miles from Windsor to and fro after dark for the one or two bright hours I spent there. My cousin Kate or Miss King would play the piano and sing. They would not talk to me as though I was the lowest thing on earth. There, I was still esteemed clever, and the queer things I said were applauded. My cousins,



delighted at my appreciation, sang to me and I sat on a little stool close to the piano in a state of rapt appreciation—of the music, the shaded lamp, the comfort and the ease of it.

Then came terrible questioning at the shop. I was almost charged with stealing. But my Uncle Tom defended me stoutly. 'You better not go saying *that*,' said my Uncle Tom, and indeed, except that there was now a continual shortage in the cash desk, there was no evidence against me. I had no expensive vices; I had no criminal associates, I was extremely shabby and untidy; no marked money—if they used marked money—or indeed any money except the weekly sixpence allowed me for pocket money, had ever been found upon me and my bearing was one of unconscious but convincing honesty. Indeed I never realized fully what all the fuss was about until afterwards. Yet the fact remains that as a cash desk clerk I had failed abominably and somebody—I suppose—had got away with the money.

It was plain also that I shirked all my other tasks. And while my start in life was thus already faltering, I had some sort of difference with the junior porter, which resulted in a conspicuous black eye for me. It was all wrong for an apprentice to fight a mere porter. I had great difficulty in explaining that black eye to my own satisfaction at Surly Hall. Moreover, the clothes I had come to Windsor in were anything but stylish, and Mr Denyer, the most animated of the partners, liked the look of me less and less. I wore a black velvet cap with a peak and that was all wrong. It became plain that my mother's first attempt to give me a start in life had failed. I was not starting. I was not fitted, said Messrs Rodgers and Denyer, with perfect truth, to be a draper. I was not refined enough.



## CHAPTER VI

### SECOND START IN LIFE—WOOKEY (WINTER 1880)

THE poor little family commander-in-chief—for that she had become—in lace cap and apron in the housekeeper's room at Up Park had to deal with the situation as her lights and limitations permitted. Joe at Bromley, tied by the leg, had little to suggest. He had had an idea, in view of my remarkable special certificates for book-keeping, that Messrs Hoare's or Norman's, for whom he had bowled at cricket practice so often, ought to have welcomed me as a bank clerk, but when it became clear that Hoares and Normans were unresponsive, he made no further effort to assist my mother in her difficulties. Shelter and nourishment and employment had to be found for the youngster somehow. And at this point an Uncle Williams came in with what seemed a hopeful suggestion. He was going to be head of a little National School. I might become a pupil teacher under him.

In those days a great deal of the teaching, such as it was, in elementary schools was done by children scarcely older than the pupils. Instead of leaving school for work they became 'P.T.s' and, after four years, competent to enter a training college for a year or two, before they went on grant earning for the rest of their lives. If an elementary teacher in those days became anything more than a 'trained' drudge, it was due to his or her own exertions. My Uncle Williams, hearing of my mother's difficulties, held out hopes that my pupil teacher stage might be shortened and I might be accepted as something which he called an 'improver'.

So I was packed off from Windsor to Wookey in



Somerset, where my Uncle Williams was installed in the school house—but precariously. For he was never really qualified to teach in an English school. He had taught as a young man in Jamaica with qualifications that did not satisfy the Board of Education requirements. There had been a certain lack of clearness on that point in his application for the post and when that came to light, he had to get out of Wookey again. And the same lack of clearness finished the scholastic career he proposed for me in the course of two or three months.

But it gave me the idea that there was something to be done in teaching and that it was pleasanter to stand in front of a class and distribute knowledge and punishments, than sit at a desk or hover behind a counter, at the beck and call of any number of seniors.

I found teaching heavy going but far more interesting than work in a cash desk. Discipline was difficult to maintain; some of the boys were as big as myself and sturdier, and my cockney accent was unpleasant to Somerset ears. Except for occasional hints from Uncle Williams, I had to find out how and what to teach. I taught them dates and geographical lists and sums and tables of weights and measures and reading, as well as I could. I fought my class, hit them about viciously and had altogether a lot of trouble with them.

I was growing up now. I was past fourteen; I was getting sturdier in my body and less disposed to escape from reality to reverie. The youngster who was returned rather apologetically by Uncle Williams to my mother, may have looked very much like the youngster who went in by the side door of Rodgers and Denyer to try and be a draper, but in fact he was something far more alert and solid. He had heard one or two things which, hitherto, he had avoided facing, spoken of very plainly and directly. And he had been interested by a job. He had really tried to do something instead of merely



submitting to a boring routine in a business machine he did not understand. He had come up against material fact with a new nearness and vividness, and he had learnt that laughter was perhaps a better way of dealing with reality than were the evasions of reverie. He certainly owes a great deal more to this second start in life than to the first.

## CHAPTER VII

THIRD START IN LIFE—MIDHURST  
(1881)

I DO not know how my mother hit upon the idea of making me a pharmaceutical chemist. But that was the next career towards which I (and my small portmanteau) were now directed. I spent only about a month amidst the neat gilt-inscribed drawers and bottles of Mr Cowap at Midhurst, rolled a few score rhubarb pills, broke a dozen soda-water siphons during a friendly broom fight with the errand boy, learnt to sell patent medicines, dusted the coloured water bottles, and I do not think I need here devote very much space to him and his amusing cheerful wife, seeing that I have already drawn largely upon this shop, and my experiences in it, in describing aunt and uncle Ponderevo in *Tono Bungay*. Cowap, like uncle Ponderevo, really did produce a heartening Cough Mixture, though he never soared to my hero's feat of commercial expansion. But this time I gave satisfaction, and it was upon my initiative and not upon that of my prospective employer that pharmaceutical chemistry was abandoned as my calling in life. I inquired into the cost of qualification as an assistant and dispenser; the details have long since escaped me; but I came to the conclusion that the fees and amount



of study required would be quite beyond my mother's limited resources. I pointed this out to her and she saw reason in the figures I gave her.

I was reluctant to abandon this start because I really liked the bright little shop with its drawers full of senna pods, flowers of sulphur, charcoal and suchlike curious things, and I had taken to Midhurst from the outset. It had been the home of my grandparents, and that gave me a sense of belonging there. It was a real place in my mind and not a sprawl of population like Bromley. Its shops and school and post office and church were grouped in rational comprehensible relations ; it had a beginning, a middle and an end. I know no country to compare with West Sussex except the Cotswolds. It had its own colour, a pleasant colour of sunlit sandstone and ironstone and a warm flavour of open country because of the parks and commons and pine woods about it. Midhurst was within three hours' sturdy walking from Up Park. And I had recovered my self-respect there very rapidly.

One manifest deficiency in my schooling came to light at the mere suggestion that I should be a chemist. I knew no Latin and much of the dignity of the qualified druggist at that time depended upon a smattering of that tongue. He had to read and to copy and understand prescriptions. Accordingly it was arranged that I should go to the Headmaster of the local Grammar School and have lessons in Latin. I had, I suppose, four or five hours of it before the project of my apprenticeship was abandoned, but in that time I astonished my instructor, accustomed to working with Sussex tradesmen's and farmers' sons and the like, by rushing through the greater part of Smith's *Principia*, Part I, and covering more ground than he had been accustomed to get over with his boys in a year or more. I found this fine structural language congenial just as I had found Euclid's *Elements* congenial. It was a new way of saying things. It was like something I had



been waiting for. It braced up my use of English immediately.

The Midhurst Grammar School was an old foundation which had fallen into decay and had been closed in 1859—after a fire which had destroyed the school house. It had been revived by the Endowed Schools Commissioners and the school had been reopened in 1880, less than a year before my essay in pharmacy. Mr Horace Byatt, M.A., the new headmaster, was a not very brilliant graduate of Dublin University, an animated and energetic teacher resolved to make a success of his first headmastership. He was a dark, semi-clerical man, plumply active, with bushy hair, side whiskers, a cleft chin, and a valiant voice, and he was quartered with his wife and three small children in a comfortable old house near the South Pond, until the commissioners could rebuild the school house, which was still at that time a weedy heap of ruins.

Now Cowap had counted on my premium as an apprentice, and when he realized that I did not intend to go on with that, he betrayed considerable vexation and became urgent to clear me out to make way for a more profitable youngster. My mother had nowhere for me to go and she arranged to put me as a boarder with the Grammar School headmaster until she could organize a fourth start in life for me. I became the first boarder of the reopened school. I spent about two months there, returning by special request to sit for the May examinations.

Now here again was a new phase in my very jumbled education, and one that I still look back upon with pleasure. I liked Byatt, and he formed an encouragingly high opinion of my grit and capacity. The amount of mental benefit I derived from those few weeks as his pupil cannot be measured by the work actually done; the stimulus I got was far more important. I went on with Latin but now at a reduced speed, for Byatt preferred to direct me rather towards grant-earning subjects and



put text-books in such subjects as physiology and physiography into my hands, realizing that I was capable of learning very rapidly by reading alone without any nursing in class. I could understand a book of my own accord and write, and if necessary illustrate, a good answer to a question, and that was something beyond the general capacity of his Midhurst material. I think it was extraordinary good fortune for me, that I had this drilling in writing things down at this time. It gave my reading precision and accustomed me to arrange my knowledge in an orderly fashion. There are many valid objections to a system of education controlled by written examinations; it may tend very easily towards superficiality; but I am convinced that it has at any rate the great merit of imposing method and order in learning.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOURTH START IN LIFE—SOUTHSEA (1881-1883)

WHILE I was making my first systematic acquaintance with modern science at the Midhurst Grammar School, my mother was busy finding yet another start in life for me. She had consulted Sir William King, who was Miss Fetherstonhaugh's agent and an important man in Portsmouth affairs, and he had recommended her to Mr Edwin Hyde, the proprietor of the Southsea Drapery Emporium in Kings Road, Southsea. I learnt at Easter that I was destined once again to try the difficult role of a draper, this time under this Mr Hyde. I was still unprepared with any alternative scheme. I expressed dissent, but my mother wept and entreated. I promised to be a good boy and try.



But this time I went a rebel, not indeed against my mother, whose simplicity and difficulties I was beginning to understand, but against a scheme of things which marched me off before I was fifteen to what was plainly a dreary and hopeless life, while other boys, no better in quality than myself, were enjoying all the advantages—I thought they were stupendous advantages in those days—of the public school and university. I conveyed my small portmanteau to Southsea with a sinking heart. I was left upstairs in the dormitory for a time until someone could come to show me round, and I leant upon the window-sill and looked out upon the narrow side street upon which the window gave, with no illusion about what had happened to me. I can still feel the unhappiness and dismay of that moment.

Retail trade, I thought, had captured me for good. I had now to learn to work and to work faithfully for the profit and satisfaction of my employers to the end of my days. I had been at large for a year and found no other way of living. The last chance had gone. At that moment I could not discover in my mind or in my world, as represented by the narrow side street into which I was looking, the little corner pub or the blind alley below me or the strip of sky overhead, the faintest sign of any further escape.

I turned round from this restricted outer world to survey my dormitory in much the same mood as a condemned prisoner surveying the fittings of the cell he is to occupy for the days that are left to him. . . .

It is an open question in my mind whether this dismay at the outset is the common experience of modern youth of the less fortunate classes, or whether because of the enlightenment of my previous starts I happened to see farther and more clearly than most of my fellows. A considerable number, I think, get that caught feeling rather later. My brother Frank, after fifteen years of



being good, said he could endure the life no longer and broke away. My brother Fred held to the religion of submission longer ; he was the good boy of the three of us, and he did subdue himself to the necessary routines for the best part of his life.

What overwhelmed me immediately was the endlessness of this employment and its lack of compelling interest. I do not know how the modern state as it develops will solve the problem of service in the distributing trades, but I am convinced it will have to be made an employment for short periods, short hours or alternative weeks and months with relays of workers, and that such special education as may be provided for it will link up the mind of the employee with the methods and novelties of manufacture on the one hand and the ultimate use of the goods sold on the other. Then the assistant would go behind the counter or into the stockroom with a sense of function instead of a sense of routine, there would be a minimum of shirking and resentment, and he would do his job as a brisk terminable job worth doing and would find it the more interesting the better it was done. Nothing of that sort happened in my case.

I was put first into the Manchester department, and there I found fixtures of wrapped blocks labelled incomprehensibly Hard Book or Turkey Twill or the like, rolls of grey and black silesia, flannels with a variety of names, a perplexing range of longcloths and calicoes, endless packages of table-cloths, serviettes, and so forth, and rolls of house cloth, ticking and the like. All that stuff had no origin and no purpose for me, except that it seemed to have been created to make my life burdensome. There were also in this Manchester department cotton dress materials, prints, ginghams and sateens, cretonne and kindred fabrics for covering furniture ; stuffs that were rather more understandable but equally irksome to handle. I had to straighten all this stock and pack it up



after it had been shown and put it back into the proper fixtures ; I had to measure and refold it when the manufacturers delivered it, to block it or to roll it in rolls. This blocking, rolling and folding was skilled work that needed a watchful effort I gave grudgingly, and I never learnt to do it swiftly and neatly.

Stock-keeping, showing goods and clearing up, were the middle duties of the day. We apprentices were roused from our beds at seven by one of the assistants ; he swept through the dormitory and on his return journey pulled the bedclothes off anyone still in bed. We flung on old suits, tucking our nightgowns into our trousers, and were down in the shop in a quarter of an hour, to clean. Then came window dressing and dressing out the shop. I had to fetch goods for the window dresser and arrange patterns or pieces of fabric on the brass line above the counter. Every day or so the costume window had to be rearranged and I had to go in the costume room and fetch those headless effigies on which costumes are displayed and carry them the length of the shop, to the window dresser, avoiding gas brackets, chairs and my fellow creatures on the way. Then I had to see to the replenishing of the pin bowls and the smoothing out and stringing up of paper for small parcels. The tediums of the day were broken for an hour or so while I went out to various other shops in Southsea, Portsmouth and Landport ' matching ' for the workroom, getting lengths of ribbon and material that were needed and could not be supplied out of stock, taking money from the cash desk to the bank or getting bags of small change. I loitered as much as I dared on these blessed errands, but by half past eleven or twelve at latest, the shop swallowed me up again and there was no more relief until after closing time, which came at seven or eight according to the season.

I don't think I ever had any snobbishness in me about the relative values of Latin and longcloth, but it was an



immense consolation to me in those days of drab humiliations, that after all I had been able to race through Euclid's *Elements*, Smith's *Principia* and various scientific text-books at a quite unusual speed. That consolation became brighter as my prospect of winning any of the prizes in the trade or even holding my own as a satisfactory assistant, darkened. Manifestly I had not the ghost of a chance of becoming a buyer, a shop walker, a manager, a traveller or a partner. And, meditating on my outlook, it was inevitable I should recall the nice authoritative feeling of dictating knowledge to a class and wonder whether even for me with such an appetite for learning as I possessed there might not be prizes and scholarships in the world and some niche of erudition for me to fill.

Possibly my mind would have run naturally towards such ideas, but the manager's expostulating 'I never saw such a boy! What do you think will become of you?' was undoubtedly thought-provoking. What *would* become of me?

Might there not be some Wookey where the headmaster's certificates were in order?

And at the back of my mind, growing larger and more vivid, until it was like the word of the Lord coming to one of his prophets, was the injunction: 'Get out of this trade before it is too late. At any cost get out of it.'

For some time I did not tell anyone of this amazing urgency to disentangle myself. Then I tried the idea on my brother Frank, who had settled into a reasonably pleasant job at Godalming and was 'living out' in lodgings. I used to go to him at Easter and Whitsuntide to spend hilarious friendly Bank Holidays. 'But what else can you do?' he asked. The second clerk in the booking desk, named West, was a man of some education who had had dreams of entering the Church and who took a sympathetic interest in my spurts with the Latin



grammar of an evening. I talked to him. I may have got suggestions from him. Finally I had the brilliant idea of writing to Mr Horace Byatt at Midhurst. ' Might I not be useful in the school ? '

He answered that he thought I might be quite useful.

But I was due to serve for four years and I had not yet served two. My mother had undertaken to pay a premium of fifty pounds and had already paid forty. She was dismayed beyond measure to find that once again, apparently, I was to come unstuck. She wept and prayed me to ' try again ' ; Freddy was ' trying '. I had discovered that the drapery business was a dismal trap and I meant to get out of it. My father was invoked and first he supported and then opposed my liberation.

Byatt made an offer. It was the salvation of my situation. It made my revolt reasonable. I might go as a student assistant in the Grammar School ; at first he suggested without pay and then decided that he would pay me twenty pounds a year and raise this to forty after a twelve-month. He had a faith in my grant-earning capacity that I was to justify beyond expectation and this inspired him.

I had reached a vital crisis of my life, I felt extraordinarily desperate and I behaved very much like a hunted rabbit that turns at last and bites. A hunted rabbit that turned and bit would astonish and defeat most ordinary pursuers. I had discovered what were to be for me for some years the two guiding principles of my life. ' If you want something sufficiently, take it and never mind the consequences ', was the first and the second was : ' If life is not good enough for you, change it ; never endure a way of life that is dull and dreary, because after all the worst thing that can happen to you, if you fight and go on fighting to get out, is defeat, and that is never certain till the end which is death and the end of everything.'



Not perhaps with that much clearness did I think at the time, but in that fashion I was beginning to think.

I do not remember now the exact order of events in my liberation nor when it was I wrote to Byatt. But I know things were helped by some row of which I have forgotten every particular. On some issue I had disobeyed orders. There had to be trouble. The matter was something beyond the manager, and I should have to see the owner. At any rate I got up early one Sunday morning and started off without breakfast to walk the seventeen miles to Up Park and proclaim to my mother that things had become intolerable and this drapery experiment had to end. I think that was the first intimation the poor little lady had of my crisis.

I have told just how that happened in *Tono Bungay* and how I waylaid the procession of servants as they were coming up Harting Hill from Harting Church. I appeared among the beeches and bracken on the high bank. 'Cooee Mummy,' said I, white-faced and tired, but carrying it off gaily.

The bad shilling back again !

## CHAPTER IX

### FIFTH START IN LIFE—MIDHURST

(1883-1884)

MIDHURST has always been a happy place for me. I suppose it rained there at times but all my memories of Midhurst are in sunshine. The Grammar School was growing, the school house had been built and was now occupied by Byatt and his family and filled up with a score or more of boarders ; there was already a teacher named Harris and presently came a third man Wilderspin who taught French and Latin. I lodged, and shared a



bedroom with Harris, over a little sweetstuff shop next to the Angel Hotel. For a time, until the school re-assembled, I had this room alone.

In a novel of mine called *Love and Mr Lewisham* which is about just such a Grammar School teacher as I was, I have described how he had pinned up on his wall a 'Schema', planned to make the utmost use of his time and opportunities. I made that Schema, even to calling it that and not calling it plainly a scheme. Every moment in the day had its task. I was never to rest while I was awake. I was not attacking the world by all this effort and self-control; I was making my desperate get-away from the shop and the street. I was bracing myself up tremendously. Harris and I would go for one-hour walks and I insisted on a pace of four miles an hour.

Mrs Walton, my landlady, who kept the sweetstuff shop, was a dear little energetic woman with a round friendly face, brown eyes and spectacles. I owe her incalculable things. I paid her twelve shillings a week and she fed me well. She liked cooking and she liked her food to be eaten. My meals at Midhurst are the first in my life that I remember with pleasure. Her stews were marvellously honest and she was great at junket, custard and blackberry jam. Bless her memory.

I taught in the main classroom with Byatt and he kept an eye on what I was doing and gave me some useful advice. He knew how to be lucid, persuasive and helpful. A system of neatly written-out homework held his instruction together. I rather suspect he was a trained elementary teacher before he took his Dublin degree and anyhow I learned a lot from him in handling my class of small boys. I was disposed to be over-strenuous with them as I was over-strenuous with myself, and my discipline was hard at times; I pushed and shoved them about, but I helped them whenever I grasped their difficulties and I got them along at a good pace.



But half the work I did for Byatt was done not as a teacher but as a student. His university degree qualified him to organize evening classes in any of the thirty-odd subjects in the science scheme of the Education Department, and to earn grants on his examination results. Accordingly, in addition to the three or four normal classes of a dozen or so evening students which he had hitherto conducted, he now organized a number of others for my especial benefit. They were, to put it plainly, bogus classes ; they included some subjects of which he knew little or nothing, and in none did he do any actual teaching. The procedure was to get me a good text-book, written for the examination in the subject in question, and to set me to read it in the schoolroom, while he at his desk attended to his correspondence. In this way I read up such subjects as physiography, human physiology, vegetable physiology, geology, elementary 'inorganic' chemistry, mathematics and so forth. In May came the examinations and, after that, if I got an 'advanced' first-class he earned four pounds, two pounds for a second 'advanced' and so on in diminishing amounts for a first or second 'elementary'.

The immediate result, so far as my mind was concerned, was to make me read practically the whole outline of physical and biological science, with as much care and precision as the check of a written examination imposes. I learnt a great deal very easily, but I also did a large amount of strenuous memory work.

But anyhow my reading was good enough to produce a cluster of AIs when the examination results came to hand.

Unfortunately for my headmaster, who had hoped to repeat this exploit on a still larger scale next year, I passed these May examinations with such a bang, that I was blown out of Midhurst altogether.

The Education Department of that period was not



completely satisfied with the quality of the science teaching in the country, and it was trying to develop its scattered classes into organized science schools and to produce a better type of teacher than the classical graduate clergymen and so forth, on whom it had at first to rely. Accordingly it was circularizing its successful examinees, with the offer of a certain number of free studentships, at the Normal School of Science, South Kensington, carrying with them a maintenance grant of a guinea a week during the session and second class railway fare to the capital. I read the blue form hardly believing it, filled it up secretly, and presently found myself accepted as a 'teacher in training' for a year in the biological course under Professor Huxley—the great Professor Huxley, whose name was in the newspapers, who was known all over the world!

Byatt shared my surprise if not my joy.

I had come to Midhurst a happy but desperate fugitive from servitude; I left it in glory. I spent my summer vacation partly at Up Park with my mother and partly with my father at Bromley, and I was hardly the same human being as the desperate, footsore youngster who had tramped from Portsmouth to Up Park.

## CHAPTER X

### § I

## PROFESSOR HUXLEY AND THE SCIENCE OF BIOLOGY (1884-1885)

THE day when I walked from my lodging in Westbourne Park across Kensington Gardens to the Normal School of Science, signed on at the entrance to that burly red-brick and terra-cotta building and went up by the lift to the



biological laboratory was one of the great days of my life. All my science hitherto had been second-hand—or third or fourth hand; I had read about it, crammed text-books, passed written examinations with a sense of being a long way off from the concrete facts and still farther off from the living observations, thoughts, qualifications and first-hand theorizing that constitute the scientific reality. Hitherto I had had only the insufficient printed statements, often very badly and carelessly written, of the text-books, helped out by a few perplexing diagrams and woodcuts. Now by a conspiracy of happy accidents I had got right through to contact with all that I had been just hearing about. Here were microscopes, dissections, models, specimens, museums, ready answers to questions, explanations, discussions. Here I was under the shadow of Huxley, the acutest observer, the ablest generalizer, the great teacher, the most lucid and valiant of controversialists. I had been assigned to his course in Elementary Biology and afterwards I was to go on with Zoology under him.

I worked very hard indeed throughout that first year. The scene of my labours was the upper floor of the Normal School, the Royal College of Science as it is called today, a floor long since applied to other uses. There was a long laboratory with windows giving upon the art schools, equipped with deal tables, sinks and taps and, facing the windows, shelves of preparations surmounted by diagrams and drawings of dissections. On the tables were our microscopes, dissecting dishes or dissected animals as the case might be. In our note-books we fixed our knowledge. On the doors were blackboards where the demonstrator, G. B. Howes, afterwards Professor Howes, would draw in coloured chalks for our instruction. He was a white-faced, black-bearded, nervous man; swift and vivid, never still, in the completest contrast with the powerful deliberation of the master. Huxley



himself lectured in the little lecture theatre adjacent to the laboratory, a square room, surrounded by black shelves bearing animal skeletons and skulls, a series of wax models of a developing chick, and similar material. As I knew Huxley he was a yellow-faced, square-faced old man, with bright little brown eyes, lurking as it were in caves under his heavy grey eyebrows, and a mane of grey hair brushed back from his wall of forehead. He lectured in a clear firm voice without hurry and without delay, turning to the blackboard behind him to sketch some diagram, and always dusting the chalk from his fingers rather fastidiously before he resumed. He fell ill presently and after some delay, Howes, uneasy, irritable, brilliant, took his place, lecturing and drawing breathlessly and leaving the blackboard covered with graceful coloured lines. At the back of the auditorium were curtains, leading to a museum. I was told that while Huxley lectured Charles Darwin had sometimes come through those very curtains from the gallery behind to sit and listen until his friend and ally had done. In my time Darwin had been dead for only a year or so (he died in 1882).

These two were very great men. They thought boldly, carefully and simply, they spoke and wrote fearlessly and plainly, they lived modestly and decently; they were mighty intellectual liberators. Darwin and Huxley, in their place and measure, belong to the same aristocracy as Plato and Aristotle and Galileo, and they will ultimately dominate the priestly mind, because there is a response, however reluctant, masked and stifled, in every human soul to rightness and a firmly stated truth.

This biological course of Huxley's was purely and strictly scientific in its character. It kept no other end in view but the increase and the scrutiny and perfection of the knowledge within its scope. I never heard or thought of practical applications or business uses for what we were



unfolding in that year's work, and yet the economic and hygienic benefits that have flowed from biological work in the past forty years have been immense. But these aspects were negligible by the standards of our study. For a year I went shabby and grew shabbier, I was under-fed and not very well housed, and it did not matter to me in the least because of the vision of life that was growing in my mind. I worked exhaustively and spent an even happier year than the one I had had at Midhurst. I was rather handicapped by the irregularity and unsoundness of my general education, but nevertheless I was one of the three who made up the first-class in the examinations in zoology which tested our work.

A first-class in the Normal School meant over 80 per cent of the possible marks and the two others who took first-classes were Martin Woodward, who came from a well-known family of biologists, who was afterwards drowned on the west coast of Scotland, and A. V. Jennings, the son of a London private schoolmaster, for whom I formed a considerable friendship. All the rest of the class tailed down through a second-class to failure.

Jennings was the only close associate I made in that first year. He was a year or so older than I, a slender, grey-clad, red-faced young man with close curly black hair; he had had a sound classical education, and if he had not read as discursively as I, he had read much more thoroughly. He was a well-trained student. Once we had surmounted the obstacle of my shyness of sincere discussion, we got through an immense amount of talking about religious, political and scientific ideas. I learnt a great deal from him and polished much crudity and prejudice off my mind against his. For the first time in my life I was coming into touch at South Kensington with minds as lively as or livelier than my own and much better equipped, minds interested as much as I was interested in the significance of life. They saved me to a



large extent from developing a shell of defensive reserve about my self-conceit.

Once or twice Jennings showed a personal concern for me that still glows bright in my memory. The 'Teachers in Training' at the Normal School were paid a maintenance allowance of a guinea weekly, which even in those days was rather insufficient. After I had paid for my lodgings, breakfasts and so forth, I was left with only a shilling or two for a week of midday meals. Pay day was Wednesday and not infrequently my money had run out before Monday or Tuesday and then I ate nothing in the nine-hour interval between the breakfast and the high-tea I had at my lodgings. Jennings noted this and noted that I was getting thinner and flimsier, and almost by force he carried me off to a chop house and stood me a square meal, meat, two vegetables, a glass of beer, jam-roll pudding and a bit of cheese; a memorable fraternal feast. He wanted to repeat this hospitality but I resisted. I had a stupid sort of pride about unrequited benefits or I know he would have done this frequently. 'This makes competition fairer,' Jennings insisted.

At the end of this invigorating year I had had a vague hope that I should be able to go right on with zoological work but there were no facilities for research available. I cared so much for the subject then that I think I could have sailed away to very sound and useful work in it. I could have built up the full equipment of a professor of zoology upon the basis I had secured, if I had been free to take my own where I could find it. I should have filled up my gaps. I am convinced that for college and university education, keenly interested students—and after all they are the only students worth anything; the others ought not to be there—should have much more freedom to move about and choose their own courses and teachers than is generally given them. However, my first year's performance had impressed the board of



selection sufficiently to secure my reappointment as a Teacher in Training for a second and afterwards for a third year in other departments of the school where there were vacancies to be filled.

## § 2

### PROFESSOR GUTHRIE AND THE SCIENCE OF PHYSICS (1885-1886)

The Normal School of Science and Royal School of Mines, to give it the full title it bore in these days, stood with an air of immense purposefulness four-square upon Exhibition Road. When I first took my fragile, unkempt self and my small black bag through its portals, I had a feeling of having come at last under definite guidance and protection. I felt as I think a civilized young citizen ought to feel towards his state education. If I worked hard, did what I was told and followed the regulations, then I thought I should be given the fullest opportunity to develop whatever fine possibilities were in me and also that I should be used to the best advantage for the world and myself. I thought that the Normal School of Science knew what it meant to do with me. It was only after my first year that it dawned upon me that the Normal School of Science, like most other things in the sliding, slipping civilization of the time, was quite unaware even of what it meant to do with itself. It had been hastily compiled. Only that big red-brick and terra-cotta building, in which it was then assembled, held it together.

Happily for me it happened that the vigorous, persistent, far-reaching and philosophical mind of Huxley had become very influential with the Department of Science and Art in the sixties and seventies and particularly at South Kensington, and he had been able not only to establish



that general scientific survey, physiography, as a 'subject' in the evening class curriculum throughout the country, but he had had also a practically free hand to teach the science of life in his own fashion in the Normal School. This freedom involved, however, a similar freedom for the other professors with whom he was associated and they too without any consultation with their fellows, developed their courses according to their own capacities and their ideas of what was required of them.

Now Professor Guthrie, the Professor of Physics, into whose course I fell from the top floor to the ground floor of the Normal School building, was a man of very different texture from the Dean. He appeared as a dull, slow, heavily-bearded man with a general effect of never having fully awakened to the universe about him. He seemed very old to me, but as a matter of fact he was fifty-two. It was only after some years that I learnt what it was that made him then so slow and heavy. He was ill, within a year of his death; a still unsuspected cancer in his throat was dragging at his vitality, unknown to anyone. This greatly increased the leaden atmosphere of his teaching.

But quite apart from that he was not an inspiring teacher. The biological course from which I came had been a vivid, sustained attempt to see life clearly and to see it whole, to see into it, to see its inter-connexions, to find out, so far as terms were available, what it was, where it came from, what it was doing and where it was going. And, I take it, the task of a properly conceived elementary course in Physics would be to do the same thing with non-living matter, to establish a fruitful description of phenomena, to clear up our common terminology, dating mostly from mediæval times, about space, time, force, resistance, to explore the material universe with theory and experiment and so to bring us at last to the real living edge of the subject, the line of open



questions on the verge of the unknown. But Guthrie's mind, quite apart from its present sickness, was devoid of the liveliness necessary to a great man of science. He is best remembered as the initiator of the Physical Society. His original work was not of primary importance.

Guthrie, to put it plainly, never said a thing that wasn't to be found in a text-book and his course of lectures had to be supplemented by his assistant, Professor C. V. Boys, then an extremely blond and largely inaudible young man, already famous for his manipulative skill and ingenuity with soap bubbles, quartz fibres and measuring mechanisms. In those days I thought him one of the worst teachers who had ever turned his back upon a restive audience, messed about with the black-board, galloped through an hour of talk and bolted back to the apparatus in his private room.

His turn came late in the course when I had already developed to a very high degree the habit of inattention to these physics lectures. I lost him from the word Go. If Guthrie was too slow for me, Boys was too fast. If Guthrie gave me an impression that I knew already most of what constituted the science of physics and that, though pretty in places, on the whole it was hardly worth knowing, Boys shot across my mind and vanished from my ken with a disconcerting suggestion that there was a whole dazzling universe of ideas, for which I did not possess the key. I was still in a state of exasperation at this belated discovery when the course came to an end, and in spite of a considerable loss of marks for certain defects in the apparatus I had made, I was put in the examination list at the top of the second-class. That did not shake my newborn conviction that I had learnt practically nothing about physics.



PROFESSOR JUDD AND THE SCIENCE OF  
GEOLOGY (1886-1887)

Perhaps I had been spoilt by the soundness and beauty of the biological course, but in geology again, I failed to find the inspiration that had come to me under Huxley. Judd was a better teacher than Guthrie, but he was a slow, conscientious lecturer with a large white face, small pale blue eyes, a habit of washing his hands with invisible water as he talked, and a flat voice ; and he had the same lack of militant curiosity as Guthrie in his make-up. His eye watched you and seemed to take no interest in what his deliberate voice was saying. These were superficial characteristics and I am told that not only was Judd's work sound and patient and excellent, but that he was a very good and pleasant man to know. But I never knew him and my antipathy was immediate.

Geology is a badly assembled subject, anyhow. It is rather a lore than a science. In the hands of no teacher who had to cover the whole ground, could it be made as consecutive and exciting as biology and physics, those two fundamental sciences, can be made.

I may perhaps be evolving all this adverse criticism of the courses of science at South Kensington in an unconscious attempt to solace myself for my manifest want of success there as a serious student, after my first year. The reader is better able than I am to judge of that. There can be no doubt of my failure—which led to some painful subsequent years. But when all possible allowance has been made for such a bias on my part, the facts remain that Professor Judd bored me cruelly



and that in his course just as in the physics course, my discontent preceded and did not arise out of my failures.

The still favourable opinion of the board of selection kept me at the geological course, elementary and advanced, for an academic year and a half. By that time my career as a science student was in ruins, and that favourable opinion had evaporated. The path to research was closed to me for ever. Academically I had gone to the bad. I had become notoriously unruly. I got a second-class at the end of 1886, but I failed the final examination in geology in 1887.

My return to South Kensington, after the mediocre examination results of my second year, was rather uncertain. There is a letter from myself in which I discuss the possibilities of getting a master's job in a school. This letter recalls something which otherwise I might have forgotten, how very definite my literary ambitions had already become. My fears though justifiable were not justified; I was given another chance and I did not after all, at that time, write to the scholastic agents. My father arranged for me to stay for a month with my uncle Charles, a small farmer at Minsterworth, near Gloucester. There, so soon as my anxiety about my return was dispelled, I set myself to write a paper on Socialism with which to open the autumn session of the Debating Society.

I made not the slightest attempt to get on with my geological reading. I remember I took enormous pains with that paper. I wrote in and altered until it became illegible and then I recopied it and started upon it all over again. I went for a day over to Cheltenham, where a fellow-student was staying in the parental home, a greengrocer's shop, to plan a scheme for 'capturing' the committee of the society 'in the socialist interest' and to discuss the possibility of starting a college journal.



We resolved that we were going to develop the literary and political consciousness of the Normal School.

I had just discovered the heady brew of Carlyle's *French Revolution* and the prophetic works of William Blake. Every day I went off with my note-books and text-books to either the Dyce and Foster Reading Room or the Art Library. I would work hard, I decided, for two hours, abstracting notes, getting the stuff in order—and then as a treat it should be (let us say) half an hour of Carlyle (whose work I kept at my disposal in the Dyce and Foster) or Blake (in the Art Reading Room).

So I spent the last days that were left to me before the June examination made an end for ever to my career as a serious student of science.

## CHAPTER XI

### SIXTH START IN LIFE OR THEREABOUTS (1887)

I WANT to make my physical presence, at the time I left South Kensington, as real as possible to the reader. I have given ten chapters to tell how my picture of life in the universe was built up in my brain; I now want to show what sort of body it was that carried this brain about and supplied it with blood and obedient protection. By 1887, it had become a scandalously skinny body. I was five foot five and always I weighed less than eight stone. My proper weight should have been 9 st. 11 lb., but I was generally nearer to seven, even in my clothes. And they were exceedingly shabby clothes.

I was light and thin because I was undernourished. I ate a hastily poached egg and toast in the morning before going off for my three-mile tramp to the schools and I had a meat tea about five when I got back—and a bread and cheese supper. Most of my time I was so



preoccupied with my studies and my intellectual interests that I did not observe what was happening to me, but occasionally and more especially in my third year, I would become acutely aware of my bad condition. I would survey my naked body, so far as my bedroom looking-glass permitted, with extreme distaste, and compare it with the Apollos and Mercuries in the Art Museum. There were hollows under the collar-bones, the ribs showed and the muscles of the arms and legs were contemptible: I did not realize that this was merely a matter of insufficient food and exercise. I thought it was an inferior body—perhaps past hope of mending.

I have to thank my lucky stars—and a faithful friend or so—that I did not sink as a result of my inattentions, digressions and waste of energy at South Kensington into absolute failure. Most of the orderly students in my generation made good as professors and fellows of the Royal Society, as industrial leaders, public officials, heads of important science schools; knighthoods and the like are frequent among them; I am probably the only completely unsatisfactory student turned out by the Normal School, who did not live extravagantly there and who yet came up again and made a comparative success in life. I was now nearly of age and able to realize the dangers of my position in the world, and I put up a fight according to my lights. But it was a wild and ill-planned fight, and the real commander of my destinies was a singular Destiny, which seemed to delight in bowling me over in order to roll me through, kicking and struggling, to some new and quite unsuspected opportunity.

I am a typical Cockney without either reverence or a sincere conviction of inferiority to any fellow creature. In building up in my mind a system of self-protection against the invincible fact that I was a failure as a student and manifestly without either the character or the capacity



for a proper scientific career, I had convinced myself that I was a remarkable wit and potential writer.

With every desire to be indulgent to myself I am bound to say that every scrap of writing surviving from that period witnesses that the output was rubbish, imitative of the worst stuff in the contemporary cheap magazine. There was not a spark of imagination or original observation about it. I made not the slightest use of the very considerable reservoir of scientific and general knowledge already accumulated in my brain. I don't know why. Perhaps I was then so vain that I believed I could write *down* to the public. Or so modest that I thought the better I imitated the better I should succeed. The fact remains that I scribbled trash. The only writing of any quality at all is to be found in the extremely self-conscious letters I wrote to my friends. Here I really did try to amuse and express myself in my own fashion. There is fun in them.

Meanwhile I had to live by teaching. In spite of my rather faded qualifications, there were plenty of residential school jobs at forty or fifty pounds a year to be got; I had matriculated as an ex-collegiate in London University, I was qualified to earn grants in a number of subjects, and I had had teaching experience. The Holt Academy, Wrexham, seemed, on paper, the most desirable of all the places offered me by the agencies. It was a complex organization. A boys' school plus a girls' school plus a college, promised variety of teaching and possibilities of talk and exercise with students of my own age. I expected a library, playing fields, a room of my own. I expected fresh air and good plain living. I thought all Wales was lake and mountain and wild loveliness. And the Holt Academy had the added advantage of reopening at the end of July and so shortening the gap without money after the College of Science dispersed.

But when I got to Holt I found only the decaying



remains of a once prosperous institution set in a dismal street of houses in a flat, ugly landscape. Holt was a small old town shrunk to the dimensions of a village, and its most prominent feature was a gasometer. The school house was an untidy dwelling with broken and dirty windows and a brick floor. The girls' school was perhaps a score of children and growing girls in a cramped little villa down the street. The boys' school was a handful of farmers' and shopkeepers' sons. My new employer, Jones, presented himself as a barrel of a man with bright eyes in a round, ill-shaven face, a glib tongue and a staccato Welsh accent, dressed in the black coat, white tie and top hat dear to Tommy Morley, the traditional garb of the schoolmaster. He was dirty—I still remember his blackened teeth—and his wife was dirty, with a certain life-soiled prettiness.

My dismay deepened as I went over the premises and discovered the routines of the place. The few boarders were crowded into a room or so, sleeping two and three in a bed with no supervision. My only colleague was a Frenchman, Raut. Meals were served in a room upon a long table covered with American cloth and the food was poor and the cooking bad. There was neither time-table nor scheme of work. We started lessons just anyhow. Unexpected half-holidays alternated with storms of educational energy, when we worked far into the evening. Jones had a certain gift for eloquence which expressed itself in long prayers and exhortations at meals or on any odd occasion. He did little teaching himself, but hovered about and interfered. At times, the tedium of life became too much for him and his wife. He would appear unexpectedly in the schoolroom, flushed and staggering, to make a long wandering discourse about nothing in particular or to assail some casual victim with vague disconcerting reproaches. Then for a day or so he would be missing and in his private quarters,



and Raut and I would keep such order as we found practicable and convenient.

But it was very plain to me that my career had got into a very awkward cul-de-sac. There was no getting away from this place that I could see, however much I disliked it. I had no money to get away with. There was nothing for me now but to stick it for at least a year, get some better clothes, save a few pounds, hammer away at my writing, and hope for some chance of escape. For a few weeks the weather was very good and the football season began. I played badly but with a desperate resolve to improve. The lean shock-headed intellectual doing his desperate best in open-air games is never an attractive spectacle. I had a rough time on the field because that was where the bigger louts got back upon me for my English accent and my irritating way of assuming I knew more than they did. One bony youngster fouled me. He stooped, put his shoulders under my ribs, lifted me, and sent me sprawling.

I got up with muddy hands and knees to go on playing. But a strange sickness seized upon me. There was a vast pain in my side. My courage failed me. I couldn't run. I couldn't kick. 'I'm going in,' I said, and returned sulkily to the house regardless of the game, amidst sounds of laughter.

Nothing very much was done about me that evening, but in the night I was crawling along the bedroom on all fours, delirious, seeking water to drink. The next day a doctor was brought from Wrexham. He discovered that my left kidney had been crushed.

I lay in bed in that bleakly furnished bedroom for as long as I could, meditating on my future. I spent my coming of age in bed. I had, I decided, to carry on at Holt. I had no money and practically nowhere to go. My father was selling his shop at Bromley. Up Park was wearying of Mrs Wells's family.



At intervals Mr Jones came and looked at me and I regarded him with that serenity which comes to men who know no alternatives. At first, being afraid that I might die and under the spell of my heroic self-control, he was effusive for my comfort.

In a few days his attentions faded away. I began to be hungry. The doctor said I ought to lie some days longer and be kept warm and well fed. Jones came to suggest I should go home to my friends—unpaid. I explained that I proposed to get up and resume my duties. The weather was turning cold and Jones would have no fires until the first of October, but with a stiffness and ache in my side I got up and went on with my classes in the brick-floored schoolroom. Presently I had a bad cough which grew rapidly worse. Then I discovered that the handkerchief into which I coughed was streaked with blood. The Wrexham doctor, calling to see how I was getting on, pronounced me consumptive. But consumptive or not, I meant to see the half year out at least and pocket Jones's twenty pounds. I had a faint malicious satisfaction in keeping Jones to that.

The magic word consumptive softened the heart of Up Park towards me. The defences erected against any further invasions by Mrs Wells's family were lowered. I came to what I considered a fair arrangement with Jones and set out upon my journey. I was installed in a room next to my mother's at Up Park and celebrated my arrival by a more serious hæmorrhage than any I had had hitherto.

It chanced that a certain young Dr Collins was staying in the house and he was summoned to my assistance. I was put upon my back, ice-bags were laid on my chest and the flow was stopped. I was satisfying all the conventional expectations of a consumptive very completely. I lay still for a day or so and then began to live again in a gentle fashion in a pleasant chintz-furnished, fire-warmed, sunlit room. My previous few weeks at Holt



assumed the quality of a bad dream, a quality it has never quite lost. A few days later came a box of books from an old friend, an unforgettable kindness.

I must have stayed at Up Park for nearly four months. It was an interlude not only of physical recovery but mental opportunity. I read, wrote and thought abundantly. I got better and had relapses, but none were so grave as the breakdown on arriving. Collins was a brilliant young heretic in the medical world of those days, altogether more modern than my Wrexham practitioner, and he rather dashed my pose as a consumptive and encouraged my secret hope of life by refusing to recognize me as a tuberculous case. He held—and events have justified him—that with a year or so of gentle going I might make a complete recovery.

Though I did not realize it, I was getting through something of very great importance in my education during these months of outward inaction. I was reading and reading poetry and imaginative work with an attention to language and style that I had never given these aspects of literature before. I was becoming conscious of the glib emptiness of the trash I had been writing hitherto. When I look back upon my life, there is nothing in it that seems quite so preposterous as the fact that I set about writing fiction for sale, after years of deliberate abstinence from novels or poetry. Now, belatedly, I began to observe and imitate. I read everything accessible. I ground out some sonnets. I struggled with Spenser; I read Shelley, Keats, Whitman, Lamb, Holmes, Stevenson, Hawthorne, and a number of popular novels. I began to realize the cheapness and flatness of my own phrasing. I went on indeed with the 'novel' I had worked upon at Wrexham, but with a growing distaste. I hadn't the vigour to scrap it forthwith and begin all over again. And I dislike leaving things unfinished. But I began to write other stuff.



Later on in the year, with a quickened sense of what writing could be and do, I read over with shame and contrition all that I had written and I burnt almost all of it. That seemed the only proper way of finishing it. I realized that I had still to learn the elements of this writing business. I had to go back to the beginning, learn to handle short essays, short stories and possibly a little formal verse, until I had acquired the constructive strength and knowledge of things in general demanded for any more ambitious effort. I had not, I saw, been *writing* so far. I had just been playing at writing. I had been scribbling and assuring myself and my friends that it signified something. I had been covering my failure at South Kensington with these unfounded literary pretensions. But it is very illuminating to note that I never showed these copious scribblings to anyone. I remember only sheets and sheets of boyish scrawl. I saw myself at last with a rare and dreadful plainness. Should I always be too conceited to learn? I knew I had a gift, a quality, but apparently I was too vain and confident about that quality ever to make use of it. I chewed the bitter cud of these reflections as I prowled through the beech-woods and bracken-dells of Up Park or over the yew-dotted downs by Telegraph House, nearby.

Every bit of strength I recovered, every ounce of weight I added, deepened my dissatisfaction with the indolent life I was leading, and the feebleness of my invalid efforts. I wanted to resume my attack upon the world, but on a broader basis now and with more soundness and deliberation. My idea of getting a job to keep me while writing had been a sound one, even if it had chanced upon disaster at Holt. I realized that I must insert in the place of 'while writing' a preliminary stage 'while learning to write' but otherwise the plan of campaign was sound. Better luck next time—if I was to have a next time.

And presently the old student friends who had sent me



books, the Burtons, installed in a newly-furnished, new little house, wrote to say that they had a visitor's room quite at my disposal. It was a most enticing invitation and I accepted very eagerly. I found the Burtons and their books and their talk, and the strange landscape of the Five Towns with its blazing iron foundries, its steaming canals, its clay whitened pot-banks and the marvellous effects of its dust and smoke-laden atmosphere, very stimulating. As I went about the place I may have jostled in the streets of Burslem against another ambitious young man of just my age who was then clerk to a solicitor, that friendly rival of my middle years, Arnold Bennett.

## CHAPTER XII

## SECOND ATTACK ON LONDON (1888)

I HAVE given up counting my starts in life. My next return to London was, I suppose, about the seventh or eighth in order.

I did not want to bother my friends or be bothered by them until I got a job. I knew that in the last resort I could get money from my mother, but she had now to support my father with very little assistance from brother Frank, and I was ashamed to press on her too heavily. It is doubtful if she had anything much in hand just at that time. It was possible I might not find a job because among other things I was extremely shabby. I arrived, with that old small portmanteau of mine, at St. Pancras and found a lodging for four shillings a week, in Theobald's Road. It was not really a whole room but a partitioned-off part of an attic ; it had no fireplace, and it was furnished simply with a bed, a wash-hand-stand, a chair and a small chest of drawers carrying



a looking-glass. The partition was so thin, that audibly I was, so to speak, in the next room. My neighbours were a young couple on whom I never set eyes, but their voices became very familiar to me.

In this lair I tried to do some writing and my correspondence, and from it I sallied out to find that job that was to carry me and all my fortunes until I had really mastered this writing business. I went the round of the scholastic agents, I put myself on the lists of any employment agency that did not attempt to exact a fee for registration, and I answered many impossible and some possible advertisements. I ate at irregular intervals and economically. There were good little individual shops where sausages or fish sizzled attractively over gas jets in the windows; the chops in chop houses were not bad, tea shops were multiplying; a 'cut from the joint and two vegs' in a public house cost eightpence or ninepence. In Fleet Street I tried a very cheap vegetarian restaurant, once or twice, but it left me hungry in the night. The scholastic agents said I was late in the field for a permanent job that year, but they put me down for possible visiting teaching in science. I did get a little special coaching in geology and mineralogy, with an army crammer, but that was all. My first substantial employer was my old fellow-student Jennings.

Jennings was trying to build up a position as a biological coach. He found his pay as a junior demonstrator in geology at the Science Schools insufficient, and he was using some of his capital to assemble teaching equipment. He was also lecturing in biology at the Birkbeck Institute in Chancery Lane. For these purposes he needed a collection of wall diagrams and, knowing me to be a sufficient draughtsman for the purpose, he commissioned me, so soon as he learnt I was in want of work, to make him a set. His idea was to have these copied from text-books and high-priced series of diagrams, mostly



German, which I could sketch in the British Museum Reading Room. He bought a piece of calico and paints for me, I procured one of those green, reader's tickets of very soft card, which lasted a lifetime, or until they fell to pieces, and I made my sketches in the Reading Room and enlarged them as diagrams in a small laboratory Jennings shared with a microscopist named Martin Cole at 27 Chancery Lane. Cole, at the window, prepared, stained and mounted the microscope slides he sold, while I sprawled over a table behind him and worked at my diagram painting. Cole's slides were sold chiefly to medical students, and neatly arranged upon his shelves were innumerable bottles containing scraps of human lung, liver, kidney and so forth, diseased or healthy, obtained from post-mortems and similar occasions.

My job with Jennings came none too soon, for my original five pounds had ebbed away to nothing. Before I could draw upon him, I came to the bottom of my resources. I had a sporting wish to carry the thing through if I possibly could, without a further appeal to my mother. I did some very fine computations outside small fried-fish shops and the like during these last days before Jennings and I struck our bargain. At last I came to an evening when I turned out my pocket and found a small piece of india rubber, a pocket knife and a halfpenny.

As I got up next morning I looked by chance at that halfpenny and something unusual in the design and colour caught my eye. It was a shilling, blackened by contact with the lump of ink eraser! You cannot imagine the difference that sudden windfall of eleven pence ha'penny made to my world. And first I broke my fast.

My weekdays during that period of stress were fully occupied by small activities. The British Museum Reading Room and the Education Library at South Kensington were good places for light, shelter and comfort.



You could sit in them indefinitely so long as they were open. And the streets and shops were endlessly interesting. I loitered and watched the crowds. It was encouraging to see how many people seemed able to get food and clothing.

I went on with Jennings and his diagrams, did a bit of coaching, and also I picked up small but useful sums of money, if not by journalism at least in the margin of journalism. At that time a number of new penny weeklies were coming into existence to challenge the ascendancy of the old *Family Herald* with the new board-school public. There were *Tit Bits*, *Answers* and a little later *Pearson's Weekly*. I think it was *Tit Bits* which first devised a page called 'Questions worth Answering' open to outside contributors. A dozen or so questions appeared one week and the best answer to each question was published the next. For a question accepted, one got half-a-crown; for an answer one was paid according to length. If one were lucky, one might send in an acceptable answer to one's own question. My copious reading and my special biological lore came in very usefully here. Every week I contrived in this way to add anything between two and sixpence and fourteen or fifteen shillings to my budget.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### HENLEY HOUSE SCHOOL (1889-1890)

FROM my departure from Southsea in 1883 to my return to London in 1888, the history of this brain of mine was mainly a story of growth and learning things. It acquired as much, decided as much and was exercised as much as if it had been inside the skull of a university scholar. It developed a coherent picture of the world and learnt



the use of the English language and the beginnings of literary form. But from my emergence from St Pancras Station to find lodgings and a job, this brain, for the better part of a year, was so occupied with the immediate struggle for life, so near to hunger and exposure and so driven by material needs, that I do not think it added anything very much to either its content or power. It was only after a term or so at Henley House School, that it began to take notice of external things again and resume its criticism of, and its disinterested attack upon, existence in general.

This Henley House School was, financially, a not very successful private school in Kilburn. It was housed in a brace of semi-detached villas, very roughly adapted to its educational needs. It drew its boys from the region of Maida Vale and St John's Wood; the parents were theatrical, artistic, professional and business people who from motives of economy or affection preferred to have their sons living at home. There were only a few boarders. It was a privately owned school and J. V. Milne, the proprietor, was responsible to no earthly authority for what he did or did not teach. In one of the houses he lived with his family and in the other were the various classrooms and the assistants' room. The playground was a walled gravelly enclosure that had once been two back gardens. It was too small for anything but the most scuffling of games. Equipment was little better than it had been in Morley's school; the desks were not so age-worn and there were more blackboards and maps. But it remained inadequate. When I entered upon my duties, J.V. came to me and pressed a golden sovereign into my hand. 'Get whatever apparatus you require for your science teaching,' he said.

'And if there is any change?' I asked with this fund, this endowment, in my hand.

'You can give me an account later.'



I had to administer this grant very carefully. The existing apparatus was huddled into what had once been a small bedroom cupboard on the second floor, and was in an extremely ruinous condition. My predecessor had been a Frenchman and very evidently a man of great persistence of character. His chemical teaching had apparently reached a climax in the production of oxygen by heating potassium permanganate in a glass flask. Young Roberts, the son of Arthur Roberts, the comedian, said it had been a very great lesson indeed. Those were primitive times in glass manufacture and the ordinary test-tube or Florentine flask was not of a special glass as it is now, and it cracked and flew at the slightest irregularity in its heating. My predecessor had put his permanganate in a flask, put the flask on a tripod, set a Bunsen burner beneath it and made all the necessary arrangements for collecting his oxygen. But before there was any oxygen worth mentioning to collect, the flask flew with a loud crack and its bottom descended upon the flame. My predecessor rallied his forces and put a second Florentine flask into action, with exactly the same result. A certain joyousness invaded the class as, with the spirit of the French at Waterloo, a third flask was thrown into the struggle. And so on, repeating from the beginning; joy increased and open demonstrations had to be repressed. At the end there were no more Florentine flasks and the applause broke out unhindered. The cupboard was chiefly occupied by these shattered flasks neatly arranged, each over its own proper detached bottom.

I meditated upon these traces of experimental science and upon what seemed to me to be the evidence of an attempt to make carbon-dioxide out of blackboard chalk—an attempt fore-ordained to failure because blackboard chalk is not chalk and contains no carbon dioxide. And I considered my still intact sovereign.



I discussed the matter with J.V. 'Mr Milne,' I said, 'I think experimental demonstrations before a class are a great mistake.'

'They certainly have a very bad effect on discipline,' he remarked.

'I propose,' I said, 'with your permission, to draw all my experiments upon the blackboard—in coloured chalks which I shall buy out of this pound—to explain, clearly and fully, exactly what happens and to make the class copy out these experiments in a note-book. I have never known an experiment on a blackboard go wrong. On the other hand, these attempts at an excessive realism——'

'I am quite of your mind,' he said.

'Later on, however, I may dissect a rabbit bit by bit and make them draw that. I may dissect it under water because that is cleaner and prettier than on a board, and I shall have to buy a large baking-dish and cork and lead and pins.'

'It will not be—indelicate?'

'It need not be. I will show them what to see on the blackboard.'

'One never knows what parents will find to object to. However—if you want to do it . . .'

In this way I contrived, without extravagance, to train my classes to draw, write and understand about a great many things that would have been much more puzzling for them if they had encountered them in all the rich confusion of actuality. My boys missed the usual stinks and bangs of scientific instruction and acquired instead a real grasp of scientific principles and scientific quantities.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE UNIVERSITY CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGE (1890-1893)

DURING 1889 my efforts to 'write', so far as I can remember or trace them now, died down to hardly anything at all. My hope of an income from that source had faded, and it seemed to me that such prospects in life as remained open to me, lay in school teaching. I took my Intermediate Science Examination in July 1889 with only second-class honours in zoology, and I got the diploma of licentiate of the College of Preceptors at the end of the year.

Armed with this L.C.P. diploma and my second-class intermediate honours, I became exacting with J. V. Milne. He raised my salary £10 a year and agreed to cut down the hours I had to spend at Henley House. I looked about for supplementary employment and presently found myself in correspondence with a certain William Briggs, M.A., the organizer of a University Correspondence College at Cambridge, an institution which I still think one of the queerest outgrowths of the education of that time. It flourishes still. Briggs was able to offer me just the additional work I wanted to keep me going until I took my degree of B.Sc. I went down to Cambridge to see him; we fixed up an immediate arrangement for me to earn at least £2 a week by doing his correspondence tuition in biology which was in urgent need of attention, and we further agreed that if I took my degree in October, I should leave Henley House School and have a permanent appointment with him in a Tutorial College he was developing in London.

I left Henley House at the end of the summer term, I



took my degree with first-class honours in zoology and second-class honours in geology. I had already been working for some months in my surplus time with Briggs, and I carried on first with classes in a small room above a bookshop in that now vanished thoroughfare Booksellers Row, and afterwards in a spacious well-lit establishment in Red Lion Square. There I had a reasonably well furnished teaching laboratory, with one side all blackboards and big lamps for night teaching. Briggs gave me enough work to make an average of nearly fifty hours a week.

Waste and absurdity stalk mankind relentlessly, and it is impossible to ignore the triumphs of waste and absurdity occurring in that early struggle to produce an entirely educated community. It was the most natural thing for the human mind to transfer importance from the actual learning of things, a deep, dark, intricate process, to the passing of examinations, and to believe that a man who had a certificate in his hand had a subject in his head. About a small and quite insufficient band of men who knew and wanted to teach, seethed everywhere an earnest multitude of examinees. Briggs began life as an examinee. He was a man of great simplicity and honesty. To the end of his days I do not think he realized that there was any possible knowledge but certified knowledge. He became almost a king among examinees. When I went down to Cambridge to interview him about his biological work, he already had a tutorial staff with over forty first-class honours men upon it, and he was dealing with hundreds of students and thousands of pounds.

The success of these classes of ours in satisfying the biological requirements of the examiners in London University without incurring any serious knowledge of biology, was great and rapid. We drew away a swarm of medical students from the hospital teaching in biology, we got a number of ambitious teachers, engineering and



technical students who wanted the B.Sc. degree, and so forth, and in the school holidays we packed our long black-boarded room with the cream of the elementary teachers up from the country, already B.A.s, and taking an intensive course in order to add B.Sc. to their qualifications for a headmastership. We passed them neatly and surely. In one year, the entire first class in Preliminary Scientific consisted of my men ; we had so raised the examinee standard, that all the papers from other competing institutions were pushed into the second class. Harley Street is still dotted with men who found us useful in helping them over an unreasonable obstacle, and I am continually meeting with my old students. Lord Horder was one, the late Rt. Hon. E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India (1917-22) another.

I presently added to my income by writing, in conjunction with a colleague on Briggs' staff, Walter Low, who was, until his untimely death in 1895, my very close friend, most of a monthly publication called the *Educational Times*. For the *Educational Times* I reviewed practically every work upon education that was being published at that time. This naturally set me asking over again, what I had already asked myself rather ineffectively during my time at Henley House School : ' What on earth am I really up to here ? Why am I giving these particular lessons in this particular way ? If human society is anything more than a fit of collective insanity in the animal kingdom, what is teaching for ? '

At intervals, but persistently, I have been working out the answer to that all my life, and it will play an increasing role in the story to follow.



## CHAPTER XV

### COLLAPSE INTO LITERARY JOURNALISM

(1893-1894)

THE first phase of all my resistances to the world about me has been derision. I suppose I gathered my courage in that way for more definite revolt. And now I began to be ironical and sarcastic about this job by which I earned my living and sustained my household. The loss of genuine keenness about my teaching, and a corresponding release of facetiousness brightened my style in the *Educational Times*, and presently Briggs asked me to edit (at so many hours per number) a little advertising and intercommunicating periodical of his own, the *University Correspondent*.

Both Walter Low and I were very sarcastic young men and we had excellent reason so to be. The *Educational Times* was the property of the College of Preceptors. It paid Low £50 a year as editor and another £50 a year for contributors. He and I found it convenient that I should be the contributors—all of them. It saved him a great deal of correspondence. He was older and more experienced in newspaper matters than I, and I learnt a good deal of journalistic habits and customs from him. I acquired dexterity in swinging into a subject and a variety of useful phrases and methods of reviewing. We went about together, prowling about London, two passably respectable but not at all glossy young men, with hungry side glances at its abounding prosperity, sharpening our wits with talk. I was not so flimsy as I had been; I was beginning to look more compact and substantial. Low was tall and dark. The difficulties he had experienced in early life gave him much the same discontented



and disadvantaged feeling about life that pervaded my thoughts. We were in our twenties now and still getting nowhere. It wasn't that we were failing to climb the ladder of success. We had an exasperating realization that we could not even get our feet on the ladder of success. It had been put out of our reach.

At the back of our minds was a vague feeling that we would like to begin life all over again and begin it differently ; but although this feeling may have coloured our subconsciousness and certainly deflected our behaviour, it found no more definite expression. We did not own up to it. We scoffed and assumed a confident air.

My guiding destiny was presently to wrench me round into a new beginning again, but Walter Low never got away to good fortune. He caught a cold, neglected it and died of pneumonia in 1895. Under the influence of his efforts I was beginning to write again in any scraps of time I could snatch from direct money-earning. I was resuming my general criticism of life. I had already had one curious little gleam of success. In the winter of 1890-91, after taking my degree, I had broken down and had a hæmorrhage, and Dr Collins—who believed steadfastly in my ultimate recovery—had got me nearly a month's holiday at Up Park. This had given me a period of intellectual leisureliness in which my mind could play with an idea for days on end, and I wrote a paper *The Rediscovery of the Unique* which was printed by Frank Harris in the *Fortnightly Review* (July 1891). This success whetted my appetite for print and I sent Harris a further article, the *Universe Rigid*, which he packed off to the printers at once and only read when he got it in proof. He found it incomprehensible and his immediate staff found it incomprehensible. This is not surprising, since it was a laboured and ill-written description of a four dimensional space-time universe, and that sort of thing was still far away from the monthly reviews in



1891. 'What's the fellow up to?' cried Harris, and summoned me to the office.

I found his summons disconcerting. I imagined I must wear a morning coat and a silk hat and carry an umbrella. It was impossible I should enter the presence of a Great Editor in any other guise. The umbrella, tightly rolled and with a new elastic band, was not so bad, provided it had not to be opened; but the silk hat was extremely discouraging. It was very fluffy and, as I now perceived for the first time, a little brownish in places. The summons was urgent and there was no time to get it ironed. I brushed it with a hard brush and then with a soft one and wiped it round again and again with a silk handkerchief. The nap remained unsubdued. Then, I wetted it with a sponge and then brushed. That seemed to do the trick. I hurried out, damply glossy, to the great encounter, my *début* in the world of letters.

Harris kept me waiting in the packing office downstairs for nearly half an hour before he would see me. This ruffled me still more. At last I was shown up to a room that seemed to me enormous, in the midst of which was a long table at which the great man was sitting. At the ends were a young man, whom I was afterwards to know as Blanchamp, and a very refined-looking old gentleman named Silk who was Harris's private secretary. Harris silently motioned me to a chair opposite himself.

He was a square-headed individual with very black hair parted in the middle and brushed fiercely back. His eyes as they met my shabby and shrinking form became intimidatory. He had a blunt nose over a vast black upturned moustache, from beneath which came a deep voice of exceptional power. He seemed to me to be of extraordinary size, though that was a mere illusion; but he was certainly formidable. 'And it was *you* sent me this Universe R-R-Rigid!' he roared.

I got across to the table somehow, sat down and disposed



myself for a conversation. I was empty and breathless. I placed my umbrella and hat on the table before me and realized that it had become a disgraceful hat, an insult. The damp gloss had gone. The nap was drying irregularly and standing up in little tufts all over. It was not simply a shabby top-hat; it was an improper top-hat. I stared at it. Harris stared at it. Blanchamp and Silk had evidently never seen such a hat. With an effort we came to the business in hand.

‘You sent me this Universe Gur-R-R-Rigid,’ said Harris, picking up his cue after the pause.

He caught up a proof beside him and tossed it across the table. ‘I can’t understand six words of it. What do you *mean* by it? Tell me what it is all *about*? What’s the sense of it? What are you trying to *say*?’

I couldn’t stand up to him—and my hat. I couldn’t for a moment adopt the tone and style of a bright young man of science. There was my hat tacitly revealing the sort of chap I was. I couldn’t find words. Blanchamp and Silk with their chins resting on their hands, turned back from the hat to me, in gloomy silent accusation.

‘Tell me what you *think* it’s about?’ roared Harris, growing more merciless with my embarrassment, and rapping the proof with the back of his considerable hand. He was enjoying himself.

‘Well, you see——’ I said.

‘I don’t see,’ said Harris. ‘That’s just what I don’t do.’

‘The idea,’ I said, ‘the idea——’

Harris became menacingly silent, patiently attentive.

‘If you consider time is space like, then—— I mean it you treat it like a fourth dimension like, well then you see . . .’

‘I can’t use it,’ said Harris at the culmination of the interview. ‘We’ll have to disperse the type again,’—and the vision I had had of a series of profound but



brilliant articles about fundamental ideas, that would make a reputation for me, vanished. My departure from that room has been mercifully obliterated from my memory. But as soon as I got alone with it in my bedroom in Fitzroy Road, I smashed up that hat finally. The effect of that encounter was to prevent my writing anything ambitious again, for a year or more. If I did, I might get into the presence of another editor, and clearly that was far worse than having one's MS. returned. It needed all the encouragement and rivalry of Walter Low to bring me back to articles once more and even then I confined myself mainly to the ill-paid and consequently reasonably accessible educational papers. They paid so badly that their editors had no desire whatever to look their contributors in the face.

Harris broke up the type of that second article and it is lost, but one or two people, Oscar Wilde was one, so praised to him the *Rediscovery of the Unique* that he may have had afterthoughts about the merits of the rejected stuff. At any rate, when in 1894 he became proprietor editor of the *Saturday Review* and reorganized its staff, he remembered and wrote to me and I became one of his regular contributors.

But before then there had been some violent convulsions in my affairs. That humorous, that almost facetious Destiny that rules my life, seems to have resented the possibility that I might settle down in the position of one of Briggs's prize tutors, with occasional lapses into journalism and proceeded to knock my world to pieces again with characteristic emphasis.

One evening I found myself about nine or ten at night hurrying down the slope of Villiers Street to Charing Cross Underground Station, with a heavy bag of specimens. I was seized by a fit of coughing. Once more I tasted blood and felt the dismay that had become associated with it and when I had got into the train I pulled out my



handkerchief and found it stained brightly scarlet. I coughed alone in the dingy compartment and tried not to cough, sitting very still and telling myself it was nothing very much, until at last I got to Putney Bridge. Then it had stopped. I was hungry when I got home and as I did not want to be sent to bed forthwith, I hid my tell-tale handkerchief and would not even look at it myself because I wanted to believe that I had coughed up nothing but a little discoloured phlegm, and I made a hearty supper. It was unendurable to think that I was to have yet another relapse, that I should have to stop work again. I got to bed all right. At three o'clock in the morning I was trying for dear life not to cough. But this time the blood came and came and seemed resolved to choke me for good and all. This was no skirmish ; this was a grand attack.

I remember the candle-lit room, the doctor hastily summoned and attention focused about a basin in which there was blood and blood and more blood. Sponge-bags of ice were presently adjusted to my chest, but I kept on disarranging them to sit up for a further bout of coughing. I suppose I was extremely near death that night, but I remember only my irritation at the thought that this would prevent my giving a lecture I had engaged myself to give on the morrow. The blood stopped before I did. I was presently spread out under my ice-bags, still and hardly breathing, but alive.

When I woke up after an indefinite interval it was as if all bothers and urgencies had been washed out of my brain. I was pleasantly weary and tranquil, the centre of a small attentive world. There was nothing more for me to do, nothing I could possibly attend to and I didn't care a rap. I had got out of my struggle with honour and no one could ask me to carry on with those classes any more. I was quit of them. I might write or I might die. It didn't matter. The crowning event of this



phase of my life came after seven days, when I was given a thin slice of bread and butter.

There had been a set-back to my earning power in the middle of 1891, when after a lesser hæmorrhage I had proposed to throw up my class teaching with Briggs. At that time he had found no properly qualified substitute and I had taken on the class work again after a rest. I decided that henceforth I must reckon class teaching in London as outside the range of my possibilities and so I was free to move out of town to some more open and healthy situation. But before doing that I resolved to take a fortnight's holiday, and pick up my strength at Eastbourne.

When I had been at Eastbourne for two or three days, I hit quite by accident upon the true path to successful free-lance journalism. I found the hidden secret in a book by J. M. Barrie, called *When a Man's Single*. Let me quote the precious words through which I found salvation. 'You beginners', said the wise Rorrison, 'seem able to write nothing but your views on politics, and your reflections on art, and your theories of life, which you sometimes even think original. Editors won't have that, because their readers don't want it. . . . You see this pipe here? Simms saw me mending it with sealing-wax one day, and two days afterwards there was an article about it in the *Scalping Knife*.'

'Once I challenged him to write an article on a straw that was sticking to the sill of my window, and it was one of the most interesting things he ever did. Then there was the box of old clothes and other odds and ends that he promised to store for me when I changed my rooms. He sold the lot to a hawker for a pair of flower-pots, and wrote an article on the transaction. Subsequently he had another article on the flower-pots; and when I appeared to claim my belongings he got a third article out of that.'



Why had I never thought in that way before? For years I had been seeking rare and precious topics. *Rediscovery of the Unique!* *Universe Rigid!* The more I was rejected the higher my shots had flown. All the time I had been shooting over the target. All I had to do was to lower my aim—and hit.

I did lower my aim and by extraordinary good fortune I hit at once. My friendly Destiny had everything ready for me. It had arranged that an American millionaire, Mr W. W. Astor, not very well informed about the journalistic traditions of Fleet Street, should establish himself in London and buy the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As soon as the transaction was completed he called the Editor to him, and instructed him to change his politics. The Editor and most of the staff resigned, to the extreme surprise of Mr Astor who, casting about for an immediate successor and meeting at dinner a handsome and agreeable young man, Harry Cust, whose knowledge of literature and the world were as manifest as his manners were charming, offered him the vacant editorship, then and there. Cust was a friend of W. E. Henley, the editor of the small, bright and combative *National Observer*, and to him he went for advice and help. A staff was assembled on which experienced journalists mingled with writers of an acuter literary sensibility, and in the highest of spirits and with a fine regardlessness of expenditure—for was not Astor notoriously a multi-millionaire—Cust set out to make the *Pall Mall Gazette* the most brilliant of recorded papers. Large and extravagant offices were secured in the West End near Leicester Square. Everyone available in Cust's social circle and Henley's literary world, was invoked to help, advise, criticize. Among other strange rules in the office was one that no contribution offered should go unread. The rate of pay was exceptionally good for the time, and there was less space devoted to news and politics



and more to literary matter than in any other evening paper.

Quite unaware of this blossoming of generous intentions within the cold resistances of the London press, I lay in the kindly sunshine beneath the white headland of Beachy Head and read my Barrie. Reading him just in time. How easy he made it seem! I fell into a pleasant meditation. I reflected that directly one forgot how confoundedly serious life could be, it did become confoundedly amusing. For instance those other people on the beach. . . .

I returned to my lodgings with the substance of an article *On Staying at the Seaside* scribbled on the back of a letter and on its envelope. My cousin at Windsor was a typist and I sent the stuff for her to typewrite. Then I posted this to the *Pall Mall Gazette* and received a proof almost by return. I was already busy on a second article which was also accepted. Next I dug up a facetious paper I had written for the *Science Schools Journal* long ago, and rewrote it as *The Man of the Year Million*. This appeared later in the *Pall Mall Budget*. It was illustrated there and someone in *Punch* was amused by it and quoted it and gave another illustration. I had been learning the business of writing lightly and brightly for years without understanding that I was serving an apprenticeship. The *Science Schools Journal*, the *University Correspondent*, the *Educational Times*, the *Journal of Education*, had been, so to speak, my exercise books, and my endless letters to appreciative friends and even my talks to quick-witted associates like Walter Low, had been releasing me from the restricted vocabulary of my boyhood, sharpening my phrasing and developing skill in expression. At last I found myself with the knack of it.

I do not now recall the order of the various sketches, dialogues and essays I produced in that opening year of



journalism. They came pouring out. Some of the best of them are to be found collected in two books, *Certain Personal Matters* and *Select Conversations with an Uncle*. Much of that stuff was good enough to print but not worth reprinting. Barrie was entertained by one of these articles and asked Cust who had written it. When Cust expressed his approval of my work to me and demanded more, I asked him to let me have some reviewing and routine work to supplement my income when I was not in the mood to invent, and he agreed. - Books for review came to hand. . . .

In a couple of months I was earning more money than I had ever done in my class-teaching days. It was absurd. I forgot all the tragedy of my invalidism.

I continued to write with excitement and industry, I found ideas came to hand more and more readily, and now the return of a manuscript was becoming rare. Editors were beginning to look out for me and I was learning what would suit them. I will give the testimony of my little bank-books to show how the financial pressure upon me was relieved and overcome. In 1893 I had made £380 13s. 7d. and it had been extremely difficult to keep things going. In 1894 I earned £583 17s. 7d. ; in 1895 £792 2s. 5d., and in 1896 £1,056 7s. 9d. Every year for a number of years my income went on expanding in this fashion. I was able to move my father and mother and brother to a better house in 1896 and afterwards buy it for them. My wilder flounderings with material fortune were over ; my Destiny seemed satisfied with my further progress.



## CHAPTER XVI

### FAIRLY LAUNCHED AT LAST

THIS is an experiment in autobiography and I am writing for myself quite as much as for my reader. The main story is the development, the steady progressive growth of a modern vision of the world, and the way in which the planned reconstruction of human relationships in the form of a world-state became at last the frame and test of my activities. My life in the fact that it has evolved a general sustaining idea has become a religious life. My essential purpose is that world-vision.

But before I can get on to this a further amount of anecdote and incident is needed to make this development clear. My struggle for a footing is still only half told.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was an extraordinarily favourable time for new writers and my individual good luck was set in the luck of a whole generation of beginners. Quite a lot of us from nowhere were 'getting on'. The predominance of Dickens and Thackeray and the successors and imitators they had inspired was passing. In a way they had exhausted the soil for the type of novel they had written. For a generation the prestige of the great Victorians remained like the shadow of the vast trees in a forest, but now that it was lifting, every weed and sapling had its chance, provided only that it was of a different species from its predecessors. When the woods are burnt, it is a different tree which reconstitutes the forest. The habit of reading was spreading to new classes with distinctive needs and curiosities. They did not understand and enjoy the conventions and phrases of Trollope or Jane Austen, or



the genteel satire of Thackeray, they were outside the 'governing class' of Mrs Humphry Ward's imagination, the sombre passions and inhibitions of the Brontë country or of Wessex or Devonshire had never stirred them, and even the humours of Dickens no longer fitted into their everyday experiences.

The Education Act of 1871 had not only enlarged the reading public very greatly, but it had stimulated the middle class by a sense of possible competition from below. And quite apart from that, progress was producing a considerable fermentation of ideas. An exceptional wave of intellectual enterprise had affected the British 'governing class'. Under the influence of such brilliant Tories as Arthur Balfour and George Wyndham, a number of people in society were taking notice of writing and were on the alert for any signs of literary freshness. Such happy minor accidents as the invasion of England by the Astor family with a taste for running periodicals at a handsome loss, contributed also in their measure to the general expansion of opportunity for new writers. New books were being demanded and fresh authors were in request. Below and above alike there was opportunity, more public, more publicity, more publishers and more patronage. Nowadays it is relatively hard for a young writer to get a hearing. He (or she) plunges into a congested scramble. Here as everywhere production has outrun consuming capacity. But in the nineties young writers were looked for. Even publishers were looking for them.

For a time the need to be actually new was not clearly realized. Literary criticism in those days had some odd conventions. It was still either scholarly or with scholarly pretensions. It was dominated by the idea that whatever is worth knowing is already known and whatever is worth doing has already been done. Astonishment is unbecoming in scholarly men and their attitude



to newcomers is best expressed by the word 'recognition'. Anybody fresh who turned up was treated as an aspirant Dalai Lama is treated, and scrutinized for evidence of his predecessor's soul. So it came about that every one of us who started writing in the nineties was discovered to be 'a second'—somebody or other. In the course of two or three years I was welcomed as a second Dickens, a second Bulwer Lytton and a second Jules Verne. But also I was a second Barrie, though J.M.B. was hardly more than my contemporary, and, when I turned to short stories, I became a second Kipling. I certainly, on occasion, imitated both these excellent masters. Later on I figured also as a second Diderot, a second Carlyle and a second Rousseau. . . .

Until recently this was the common lot. Literature 'broadened down from precedent to precedent'. The influence of the publisher who wanted us to be new but did not want us to be *strange*, worked in the same direction as educated criticism. A sheaf of second-hand tickets to literary distinction was thrust into our hands and hardly anyone could get a straight ticket on his own. These second-hand tickets were very convenient as admission tickets. It was, however, unwise to sit down in the vacant chairs, because if one did so, one rarely got up again.

Of course, my wife Jane and I, starting life afresh in our guinea-a-week ground floor apartments in Mornington Place, had no suspicion how wise we had been in getting born exactly when we did. We did not realize we were like two respectable little new ordinary shares in a stock-exchange boom. We believed very gravely in the general sanity of things and we took the tide of easy success which had caught us up, as the due reward of our activity and efforts. We thought this was how things had always been and were always going to be. It was all delightfully simple. We were as bright and witty as we knew how, and acceptance, proofs and a



cheque followed as a matter of course. I was doing my best to write as other writers wrote, and it was long before I realized that my exceptional origins and training gave me an almost unavoidable freshness of approach and that I was being original in spite of my efforts to justify my secondariness.

Our life in 1894 and 1895 was an almost continuous duologue. In Mornington Place and in Mornington Road we occupied a bedroom and came through folding doors to our living-room. All our clothing was in a small chest of drawers and a wardrobe and I did my work at a little table with a shaded paraffin lamp in the corner or, when it was not needed for a meal, at the table in the middle of the living-room. All my notes and manuscripts were in a green cardboard box of four drawers. Our first landlady in Mornington Place was a German woman, Madame Reinach, and her cooking was so emphatic, her sympathy with our romantical state so liberally expressed, her eagerness for mutual confidences so pressing, and her own confidences so extraordinary, that presently Jane went off by herself to Mornington Road and found another lodging for us.

Here our landlady, whose name by some queer turn I have forgotten, mothered us very agreeably. She was a tall, strong-faced, Scotswoman. For a London landlady she was an exceptionally clean, capable, silent and stoical woman. She had been housemaid, if I remember rightly, in the household of the Duke of Fife, and she began to approve of me when she found I worked continuously and never drank.

We would wake cheerfully and get up and I would invent rhymes as we washed and dressed. Perhaps we would peep through the folding doors and if the living-room was empty, one of us, I in trousers and nightshirt or Jane in her little blue dressing-gown and her two blonde pigtails reaching below her waist, would make a dash



for the letters. Usually they were cheering letters. Perhaps there was a cheque ; perhaps there was an invitation to contribute an article or maybe there was a book for review. As we read these, a firm tread on the stairs, a clatter and an appetizing smell and at last a rap-rap on the folding doors announced our coffee and eggs and bacon.

How vividly I remember the cheerfulness of that front room ; Jane in her wrapper on the hearthrug toasting a slice of bread ; the grey London day a little misty perhaps outside and the bright animation of the coal-fire reflected on the fire-irons and the fender !

After breakfast I would set to work upon a review or one of the two or three articles I always kept in hand, working them up very carefully from rough notes until I was satisfied with them. Jane would make a fair copy of what I had done, or write on her own account, or go out to supplement our landlady's catering, or read biology for her final B.Sc. degree examination. After the morning's work we might raid out into Regent's Park or up among the interesting shops and stalls of the Hampstead Road, for a breath of air and a gleam of amusement before our one o'clock dinner. After dinner we would prowl out to look for articles.

This article hunt was a very important business. We sought unlikely places at unlikely times in order to get queer impressions of them. We went to Highgate Cemetery in the afternoon and protested at the conventionality of the monumental mason, or we were gravely critical, with a lapse into enthusiasm in the best art-critic manner, of the Parkes Museum (sanitary science), or we went on a cold windy day to Epping Forest to write ' Bleak March in Epping Forest '. We nosed the Bond Street windows and the West End art and picture shows to equip an Uncle I had invented to suit the taste of the *Pall Mall Gazette*—a tremendous man of the world



he was, the sort of man who might live in the Albany. I was still a fellow of the Zoological Society and we sought articles and apt allusions from cage to cage. Whenever we hit upon an idea for an article that I did not immediately write, it was put into the topmost of my nest of green drawers for future use.

We went very little to concerts, theatres or music-halls for the very sound reason that we could not afford it. Our only exercise was 'going for a walk'. And for a time except for occasional after-supper visitors we had no social life at all. But then I never had had any social life and Jane's experience had been chiefly of little dances, tea parties, croquet parties and lawn tennis in Putney, formal entertainments of which she was now disposed to be very scornful.

It is perhaps not surprising that as the spring came on, Jane and I, in spite of our encouraging successfulness, displayed signs of being run down. I had something wrong with a gland under my jaw and when I called in a Camden Town doctor to clean it up for me, he insisted that Jane was in a worse state than I and that she ought to be much more in the fresh air and better nourished if she was not to become tuberculous. We decided to transfer ourselves to country lodgings for the summer. Except for the facilities of getting books and the advisability of being near one's editors, there seemed to be no particular reason why we should be tied to London. Moreover Jane's mother, Mrs Robbins, had let her house at Putney; she had been lodging with some friends in North London and she too was ailing and in need of the open air. She was quite ready to join us. And while we were hesitating on the verge of this necessity came an accession of work that seemed to make an abandonment of London altogether justifiable.

I was invited one day to go and see my editor, Cust of the *Pall Mall Gazette*—either that or I had asked to see



him, I forget which. I went down to the office for my second encounter with an editor, but this time I wore no wetted top-hat to shame me by its misbehaviour and no tail coat. I was evidently wearing quite reasonable clothes because I have forgotten them. I was learning my world. The *Pall Mall Gazette* was installed in magnificent offices in the position now occupied by the Garrick Theatre. I was sent up to the editor's room. I remember it as a magnificent drawing-room; Fleet Street hath not its like today. There was certainly one grand piano in it, and my memory is inclined to put in another. There was a vast editor's desk, marvellously equipped, like a desk out of Hollywood. There were chairs and sofas. But for the moment I saw nobody amidst these splendours. I advanced slowly across a space of noiseless carpet. Then I became aware of a sound of sobbing and realized that someone almost completely hidden from me lay prostrate on a sofa.

In the circumstances a cough seemed to be the best thing.

Thereupon the sound from the sofa ceased abruptly and a tall blond man sat up, stared and then stood up, put away his pocket handkerchief and became entirely friendly and self-possessed. Whatever emotional crisis was going on had nothing to do with the business between us and was suspended. Yes, he wanted to see me. He liked my stuff and it was perfectly reasonable that I should want to make up my income by doing reviewing. There wasn't any job he could give me on the staff just now. So soon as there was he would think of me. Did I know W. E. Henley? I ought to go and see him.

He asked me where I got my knowledge and how I had learnt to write and what I was and I told him to the best of my ability. He put me at my ease from the beginning. There was none of the Olympian nonsense of Frank Harris about him. He combined the agreeable manners



of an elder brother with those of a fellow adventurer. It wasn't at all Fleet Street to which he made me welcome, but a Great Lark in journalism. I suppose he knew hardly more of Fleet Street than I did. I must certainly go and see Henley, but just now there was someone else I must meet.

He touched a bell and presently across the large spaces of the room appeared Mr Lewis Hind. Hind was a contrast to Cust in every way, except that he too was an outsider in the journalistic world. He was tall, dark and sallow, with a reserved manner and an impediment in his speech. He had begun life in the textile trade and at one time he had gone about London with samples of lace. He had been an industrious student at the Birkbeck Institute and he had adventured into the expanding field of journalism. The *Gazette* had thrown off a weekly satellite, the *Pall Mall Budget*, which was at first merely a bale of the less newsy material in the *Gazette*. My *Man of the Year Million* had appeared in it, with some amusing illustrations, and had made a little success for me. Hind edited this budget and it was proposed to expand it presently into an independent illustrated weekly with original matter, all its own. He was looking for 'features'. He carried me off from Cust's room to his own less palatial quarters and there he broached the idea of utilizing my special knowledge of science in the expanded weekly, in a series of short stories to be called 'single sitting' stories. I was to have five guineas for each story. It seemed quite good pay, then, and I set my mind to imagining possible stories of the kind he demanded.

We left Cust in his office. Whether he went on with his crisis or forgot about it I cannot say, but from my later acquaintance with him, I think he most probably forgot about it.

The first of the single sitting stories I ground out was



the *Stolen Bacillus* and after a time I became quite dexterous in evolving incidents and anecdotes from little possibilities of a scientific sort. I presently broadened my market and found higher prices were to be got from the *Strand Magazine* and the *Pall Mall Magazine*. Many of these stories, forty perhaps altogether, have been reprinted again and again in a variety of collections and they still appear and reappear in newspapers and magazines. Hind paid me £5 for them, but the normal fee I get nowadays for republication in a newspaper is £20, and many have still undeveloped dramatic and film possibilities. I had no idea in those energetic needy days of these little tips I was putting aside for my declining years.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A SERIAL STORY AND BERNARD SHAW

At about the same time that Hind set me writing short stories, I had a request from the mighty William Ernest Henley himself for a contribution to the *National Observer*. I went to see the old giant at his house upon the riverside at Putney. He was a magnificent torso set upon shrunken withered legs. When I met President Franklin Roosevelt this spring I found the same big chest and the same infirmity. He talked very richly and agreeably and, as he talked, he emphasized his remarks by clutching an agate paper weight in his big paw and banging it on his writing table. Years afterwards when he died his wife gave me that slab of agate and it is on my desk before me as I write. I resolved to do my very best for him and I dug up my peculiar treasure, my old idea of 'time-travelling', from the *Science Schools Journal* and sent him in a couple of papers. He liked them and



asked me to carry on the idea so as to give glimpses of the world of the future. This I was only too pleased to do, and altogether I developed the notion into seven papers between March and June. I had realized that the more impossible the story I had to tell, the more ordinary must be the setting, and the circumstances in which I now set the *Time Traveller* were all that I could imagine of solid upper-middle-class comfort.

With these *Time Traveller* papers running, with quite a number of stories for Hind germinating in my head, with a supply of books to review and what seemed a steady market for my occasional, my frequent occasional, articles in the *Gazette*, it seemed no sort of risk to leave London for a lodging at Sevenoaks, and thither we went, all three of us, as London grew hot and dusty and tiring. For a while things were very pleasant at Sevenoaks. We went for long walks and Jane recovered rapidly in health and energy. We explored Knole Park and down the long hill to Tonbridge and away to the haunts of my grandfather, Penshurst Park. Jane was still working for her final degree, though she never actually sat for the examination; botany was to be one of her three subjects and we gathered and brought home big and various bunches of flowers so that she might learn the natural orders.

It seemed rather useless to go on writing articles. All the periodicals to which I contributed were holding stuff of mine in proof and it might be indiscreet to pour in fresh matter to such a point that the tanks overflowed and returned it. But I had one thing in the back of my mind. Henley had told me that it was just possible he would presently find backing for a monthly. If so, he thought I might rewrite the *Time Traveller* articles as a serial story. Anyhow that was something to do and I set to work on the *Time Machine* and rewrote it from end to end.



I still remember writing that part of the story in which the Time Traveller returns to find his machine removed and his retreat cut off. I sat alone at the round table downstairs writing steadily in the luminous circle cast by a shaded paraffin lamp. Jane had gone to bed and her mother had been ill in bed all day. It was a very warm blue August night and the window was wide open. The best part of my mind fled through the story in a state of concentration, but some outlying regions of my brain were recording other things. Moths were fluttering in ever and again and though I was unconscious of them at the time, one must have fallen near me and left some trace in my consciousness that became a short story I presently wrote, *A Moth, Genus Novo*. And outside in the summer night a voice went on and on, a feminine voice that rose and fell. It was Mrs —, I forget her name—our landlady in open rebellion at last, talking to a sympathetic neighbour in the next garden and talking through the window at me. I was aware of her and heeded her not, and she lacked the courage to speak to me directly. 'Would I *never* go to bed? How could she lock up with that window staring open? Never had she had such people in her house before—never. What she let her rooms to was summer visitors who walked about all day and went to bed at night. And she hated meanness and there were some who could be mean about sixpences. People with lodgings to let in Sevenoaks ought to know the sort of people who might take them. . . .'

It went on and on. I wrote on grimly to that accompaniment. I wrote her out and she made her last comment with the front door well and truly slammed. I finished my chapter before I shut the window and turned down and blew out the lamp. And somehow the *Time Machine* got itself finished.

Before our return to London I had a letter from Henley telling me it was all right about that monthly of his.



He was to start *The New Review* in January and he would pay me £100 for the *Time Machine* as his first serial story. One hundred pounds! And at the same time the mills of the *Pall Mall Gazette* began to go round and consume my work again. Mrs Robbins went back to stay with friends in North London and Jane and I found our old rooms with our Scotch landlady at 12 Mornington Road, still free for us.

We seem to have stuck it in London for the rest of the year. Somewhen that autumn Frank Harris, who was no longer editing the *Fortnightly Review*, obtained possession of the weekly *Saturday Review*. He proceeded to a drastic reconstruction of what was then a dull and dignified periodical. He remembered those two early articles of mine, the one he had published and the one he had destroyed, and he sent for me at once. He sent also for Walter Low and a number of other comparatively unknown people. The office was in Southampton Street, off the Strand, and it occupied the first and second floors. I found people ascending and descending and the roar of a remembered voice told me that Harris was on the higher level. I found Blanchamp in a large room on the drawing-room floor amidst a great confusion of books and papers and greatly amused. Harris was having a glorious time of it above. He had summoned most of the former staff to his presence in order to read out scraps from their recent contributions to them and to demand why they wrote like that?

Clergymen, Oxford dons, respectable but strictly anonymous men of learning and standing, came hustling downstairs in various phases of indignation and protest, while odd newcomers in strange garments waited their turn to ascend. I came late on the list and by that time Harris was ready for lunch and took Blanchamp, Low and myself as his guests and audience to the Café Royal. I don't think we talked much about my prospective



contributions. But I gathered that our fortunes were made, that Oxford and the Stuffy and the Genteel and Mr Gladstone were to be destroyed and that under Harris the *Saturday Review* was to become a weekly unprecedented in literary history.

It did in fact become a very lively, readable and remarkable publication. It was never so consciously and consistently 'written' as Henley's defunct *National Observer*, but it had a broader liveliness and a far more vigorous circulation. Among other rising writers Harris presently had at work upon it was a lean, red-haired Irishman named Shaw, already known as a music critic and a Socialist speaker, who so far broke through its traditional anonymity as to insist upon his initials appearing after his dramatic criticisms.

I had known him by sight since the Henley days, but I had never spoken to him before. I accosted him as a *Saturday Review* colleague one evening after leaving a theatre, and we walked back to our respective lodgings northward while we talked very interestingly.

Shaw was then a slender young man of thirty-five or so, very hard-up, with a modest brown jacket suit, a very white face and very red whiskers. (Now he has a very red face and very white whiskers, but it is still the same Shaw.) He talked like an elder brother to me in that agreeable Dublin English of his. I liked him with a liking that has lasted a lifetime. In those days he was just a brilliant essayist and critic and an exasperating speaker in Socialist gatherings. He had written some novels that no one thought anything of, and his plays were still to be written.

From that time onward I saw him every so often, but I did not see very much of him until I went into the Fabian Society, six or seven years later. Then he was a man in the forties and a much more important figure. He was married and he was no longer poor. His opinions



and attitudes had developed and matured and so had mine. We found ourselves antagonistic on a number of issues and though we were not quite enough in the same field nor near enough in age to be rivals, there was from my side at any rate, a certain rivalry between us.

We were both socialists ; we were both attacking an apparently fixed and invincible social system from the outside ; but this much resemblance did not prevent our carrying ourselves with a certain defensiveness towards each other that remains to this day. In conversation a man's conclusions are of less importance than his training and the way he gets to them, and in this respect chasms of difference yawned between Shaw and myself. I have tried to set out my own formal and informal education in a previous chapter. Shaw had had no such sustained and constructive mental training as I had been through, but on the other hand he had been saturated from his youth up in good music, brilliant conversation and the artistic enjoyment of life. I have no delusions about the natural goodness and wisdom of human beings and at bottom I am grimly and desperately educational. But Shaw's conception of education is to let dear old Nature have her way.

\* \* \* \*

I set about finding a little house in the country, where I could follow up with another book the success that I felt was coming to the *Time Machine* and my short-story volume.

Our withdrawal to Woking was a fairly cheerful adventure. We borrowed a hundred pounds and with it, believe it or not, we furnished a small semi-detached villa with a very small greenhouse in the Maybury Road facing the railway line, where all night long the goods trains shunted and bumped and clattered—without serious





September 9<sup>th</sup> 1896-

We cut our first Mums.

A GARDENING TRIUMPH AT WOKING



effect upon our healthy slumbers. There I planned and wrote the *War of the Worlds*, the *Wheels of Chance* and the *Invisible Man*. I learnt to ride my bicycle upon sandy tracks with none to help me ; and after a fall one day I wrote down a description of the state of my legs which became the opening chapter of the *Wheels of Chance*. I rode wherever Mr Hoopdrive rode in that story. Later on I wheeled about the district marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians. The bicycle in those days was still very primitive. The diamond frame had appeared, but there was no free-wheel. You could only stop and jump off when the treadle was at its lowest point, and the brake was an uncertain plunger upon the front wheel. Consequently you were often carried on beyond your intentions, as when Mr Polly upset the zinc dust-bins outside the shop of Mr Rusper. Nevertheless the bicycle was the swiftest thing upon the roads in those days. There were as yet no automobiles and the cyclist had a lordliness, a sense of masterful adventure, that has gone from him altogether now.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NEW ROMNEY AND SANDGATE (1898)

IN the summer of 1898 I was on the verge of the last bout of illness in my life before my health cleared up and quite unaware of the collapse that hung over me. I ascribed a general sense of not feeling well, an inability to stick to my work—I was then writing *Love and Mr Lewisham*—to want of exercise and so the greater my tiredness the more I forced myself to exertion. What was happening was a sort of break-up of my crushed kidney, and nothing could have been worse for me than to start, as we did, upon a cycling journey to the south coast. I was ashamed



Nov 18/96



In - taking family  
Putting - good things  
into a stuffed story



Punishing authors  
for being stupid.



Catching authors altering  
stories after they have read  
& making them all wrong.



Looking up authors' stories  
to prevent their being altered  
& spoiled by stupidity



Taking authors for walks after  
feeding them to spineless & get  
no you little stupidity anyhow



of my bodily discomfort—until I was over forty the sense of physical inferiority was a constant acute distress to me which no philosophy could overcome—and I pedalled along with a head that seemed filled with wool and a skin that felt like a misfit. Somewhere on the road I caught a cold.

We struggled to Lewes and then on to Seaford. We decided I must really be overdoing this exercise and we went into lodgings for a rest. All this is brought back to me by the 'picshuas' as I called the drawings I made to record our lives together. Here under date of July 29th is one of them. We were physically unhappy and our discomfort breaks out in hatred of our fellow visitors to Seaford. Jane has complained that she is dull. Some forgotten joke about a hat is traceable; I fancy I may have used her hat as a waste-paper basket; and noises (buniks) upstairs are afflicting me. By way of rest I am struggling to complete *Love and Mr Lewisham*. Whenever I felt ill I became urgent to finish whatever book I was working on, because while a book unfinished would have been worth nothing, a finished book now meant several hundred pounds. I had already scamped the finish of *When the Sleeper Wakes* (which afterwards I rechristened in better English *When the Sleeper Awakes*) and I came near to scamping *Love and Mr Lewisham*. But the trouble that was going on in my now aching side was too rapid to allow that. *Love and Mr Lewisham* was finished with much care and elaboration some months later. Jane, after brooding over my condition, was struck by an idea and went out and bought a clinical thermometer. We found my temperature had mounted to 102° F.

We had no established doctor, but I had a friend, Henry Hick, who was medical officer of health for Romney Marsh and who had asked us to stay a night with him in the course of our cycling tour. New Romney seemed close at hand, we exchanged telegrams and I went to him





SEAFORD



at once by little cross-country lines and several changes of train. I was now in considerable pain, the jolting carriages seemed especially uncomfortable, I suffered from intense thirst, I could get nothing to drink and the journey was endless. With an unfaltering gentleness and no sign of dismay, Jane steered this peevish bundle of suffering to its destination. Hick was a good man at diagnosis and he did me well. An operation seemed indicated and he put me to bed and starved me down to make the trouble more accessible to the scalpel, but when the surgeon came from London it was decided that the offending kidney had practically taken itself off and that there was nothing left to remove. Thereupon I began to recover and after a few years of occasional pain not even a twinge remained of my left kidney.

A queer little incident in my illness, which it would be ungrateful to omit, was the sudden appearance of Henry James and Edmund Gosse at New Romney, riding upon bicycles from the direction of Rye. They took tea with Dr Hick and us and were very charming and friendly, and Jane and I were greatly flattered by their visit. It never dawned upon me that they had any but sociable motives in coming over to see me. And later on, when I was in Beach Cottage, J. M. Barrie came in to see me. I gathered he had taken it into his head to spend a day at the seaside and visit me. Barrie talked slowly and wisely of this and that, but particularly of his early struggles and the difficulties of young writers. There were times when a little help might do much for a man who was down. It never entered my head that I myself might be considered 'down' just then, and I argued the matter with him. Once a man borrowed or was subsidized, I said, the 'go' went out of his work. It was a dangerous and perhaps a fatal thing to deprive a man's cheques of the sharp freshness of an unencumbered gain. 'Perhaps you're right,' meditated Barrie, and went on



after a pause to tell of how when he first came to London he did not understand the nature of a cheque. 'I just put them in a drawer and waited for the fellow to send me the real money,' he said. 'I didn't see the sense of them.'

He helped himself to a buttered bun. 'When first I came to London,' he remarked, 'I lived almost entirely on buns. . . .'

The experience of later years has made me realize that in this way the Royal Literary Fund was making its inquiries about me, and that I was not so completely outside the range of assistance as I imagined. But I never had any assistance of that kind and at that time I did not want it. I was now some hundreds of pounds on the solvent side and thinking of building a house with my balance. I knew nothing of investment and having a house of my own seemed as good a use for savings as I could imagine.

## CHAPTER XIX

### BUILDING A HOUSE: FIRST BOOKS ABOUT SOCIETY (1899-1909)

WE found a site for the house we contemplated, we found an architect in C. F. A. Voysey, that pioneer in the escape from the small snobbish villa residence to the bright and comfortable pseudo-cottage. Presently we found ourselves with all the money we needed for the house and a surplus of over £1,000. And my health was getting better and better. The house was still being built when it dawned upon us as a novel and delightful idea that we were now justified in starting a family.

Voysey wanted to put a large heart-shaped letter plate on my front door, but I protested at wearing my heart so conspicuously outside and we compromised on a spade.

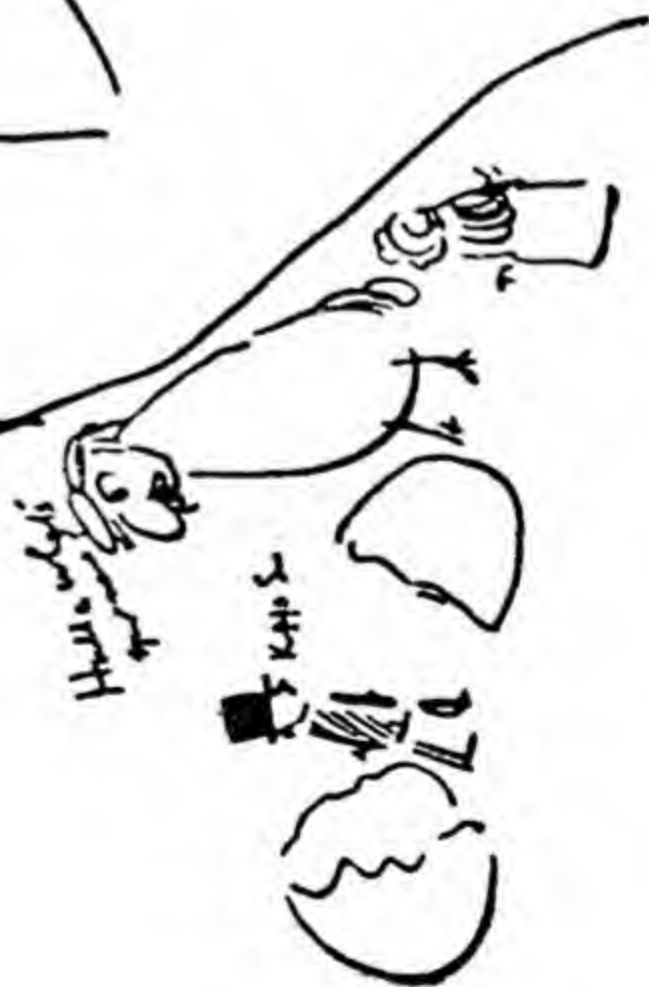




Get 5-15 983



Please Man will you register this Echin Carpe please!





We called the house Spade House. I was no longer lean and hungry-looking, I was 'putting on weight', and in order to keep it down I pulled a roller about my garden.

Spade House faced the south with a loggia that was a suntrap. The living-rooms were on one level with the bedrooms so that if presently I had to live in a wheeled chair I could be moved easily from room to room. But things did not turn out in that fashion. Before the house was finished, Voysey had revised his plans so as to have a night and day nursery upstairs, and presently I was finishing *Kipps* and making notes for what I meant to be a real full-length novel at last, *Tono Bungay*, a novel, as I imagined it, on Dickens-Thackeray lines, and I had got a bicycle again and was beginning the exploration of Kent.

In this newly-built Spade House I began a book *Anticipations* which can be considered as the keystone to the main arch of my work. That arch rises naturally from my first creative imaginations, and it leads on by a logical development to *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) and to the efforts I am still making to rescue human society from the net of tradition in which it is entangled.

Necessarily this main arch, the structural frame of my life, is of supreme importance to me, and naturally it is of supreme importance in this picture of my world. It is unavoidable, therefore, that at times I should write as if I imagined that I sustained the whole world upon my shoulders.

That is the necessary effect of an autobiographical outlook. Every man who has grown out of his early faith in the sanity of things about him and developed a social consciousness, carries his whole world upon his shoulders. In an autobiography he is bound to tell about that. He cannot pretend to be unaware of what his mind is doing. He becomes perforce the judge of all the



world. He cannot add, 'in my opinion' or, 'though it is not for me to judge', to every sentence. If he is afraid to appear self-important he had better leave out the story of his brain altogether. But then, what will remain?

Along came the end of the century, just apt to my thoughts, and I arranged with W. L. Courtney, editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, to publish a series of papers discussing what was likely to happen in the new century.

Now *Anticipations* was not only a new start for me, but, it presently became clear, a new thing in general thought. It was as new as a new-laid egg. It was the first attempt to forecast the human future as a whole and to estimate the relative power of this and that great system of influence. Partial forecasts and forebodings existed in abundance already; we had estimates for instance, of the length of time it would take to exhaust the world's coal supply, of the prospects of population if the birth-rate remained stable, of the outlook for this planet as the solar system cooled, as it was then supposed to be doing, very rapidly. A comprehensive attempt, however, to state and weigh and work out the chief forces of social change throughout the world was so much a novelty that my book, crude though it was, excited quite a number of people. Macmillans, my English publishers, were caught unawares by the demand and had sold out the first edition before they reprinted. It sold as well as a novel.

Among other people who were excited by *Anticipations* was myself. I became my own first disciple. Perhaps at the outset of this series I was inspired chiefly by the idea of producing some timely interesting articles. But before I was half way through the series I realized that this sort of thing could not remain simply journalistic. If I was not doing something widely and profoundly important I was at least sketching out something widely and profoundly important. I was writing the human prospectus.



Jan 14/93



Working for the Vindicta

I'm stuck !

ANOTHER WORK COMPLETED



In 1902 I returned to the *Fortnightly Review* in which *Anticipations* had appeared and contributed a second series of papers under the general title of *Mankind in the Making*, which was published as a book in 1903. This is less in the vein of Analytical History and more in the nature of a general prospectus for the human enterprise. In 1905, I published *A Modern Utopia*, also after a serialization in the *Fortnightly*, and in this I presented not so much my expectations for mankind as my desires.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE GREAT WAR

THE onset of the Great War hung over us all for three years before the invasion of Belgium in August 1914. The inevitability of a crash was more and more manifest, and my reluctant attention was swung round to this continually more immediate threat to the structure of civilization. No intelligent brain that passed through the experience of the Great War emerged without being profoundly changed. Our vision of life was revised in outline and detail alike.

It took me some months of reluctant realization to bring my mind to face the unpalatable truth that this 'war for civilization', this 'war to end war' of mine was in fact no better than a dream, and that the flaming actuality was simply this, that France, Great Britain and their allied Powers were, in pursuance of their established policies, interests, treaties and secret understandings, after the accepted manner of history and under the direction of their military authorities, engaged in war with the allied central powers, and that under contemporary conditions no other war was possible.

The efforts of my brain to grasp the vast possibilities



of human violence, feebleness and docility that I had neglected and ignored so long in my eagerness to push forward to the modern State, were, I suppose, paralleled in hundreds of thousands of brains. We couldn't get out of it for a time and think it out—and the young men particularly were given no time to think. They thought it out in the trenches—and in No Man's Land.

In the late summer of 1916 I visited the Italian, French and German fronts. There was a fashion in that year of inviting writers and artists to go and see for themselves what the war was like and to report their impressions. I was kept waiting about in Paris for some week or so, I had a talk with Papa Joffre and was presented solemnly with a set of coloured post cards of all the chief French generals, and very good post cards they made. I went through North Italy, returned to France to the front, and then went at my own request to the British front.

It was an interesting but rather pointless trip. I was under the wing of C. E. Montague, the author of *A Hind let Loose*, *Disenchantment* and *Rough Justice*. Montague was a year younger than I, he had concealed his age and dyed his silvery hair to enlist at the outbreak of the war, he had accepted a commission with reluctance and I had been warned he was not the safest of guides. We got on very well together. I remember vividly walking with him across the shell-hole-dotted, wire-littered open towards the front-line trenches. The sun was shining brightly and there was just the faintest whiff of freshness and danger in the air. I doubt if anything was coming over; what shelling was audible overhead was British. We had agreed that blundering up the wet and narrow communication trench was intolerable in such sunshine and we walked bare-headed and carried our shrapnel helmets, like baskets, on our arms. We had confessed to each other what a bore the war had become to us,



how it weighed us down, and we talked as we trudged along very happily, of the technical merits of Laurence Sterne.

In the front line, although he insisted on my keeping my head below the parapet, he was exposing himself freely, standing up and craning his neck in the hope of seeing a German 'out there'.

'At twilight sometimes you can see them hopping about from one shell-hole to another.'

But there was nothing doing that day, there had been some shelling overnight, but that was over, everyone in the trenches was sleeping and we returned through the tranquil desolation disputing whether there was any reason for anticipating a great outburst of literary activity as a result of the war. He thought that there ought to be and I thought that outbursts of literary activity were due to no directly traceable relation to the great events of history. . . .

At the time of this pointless sight-seeing I might have been doing extremely useful war-work at home. I was still convinced that the war had to be won by the Allies and I was only too eager to give my time and risk my life and fortune, in any task that used me effectively. But I meant to be used effectively. An old notion of mine, the *Land Ironclads* (published in the *Strand Magazine* in 1903) was being worked out at that time in the form of the Tanks, and it is absurd that my imagination was not mobilized in scheming the structure and use of these contrivances. These obvious weapons were forced upon the army against all the conservative instincts of the army; Kitchener had turned them down as 'mechanical toys', and when at length they were put into action, it was done so timidly and experimentally and with so inadequate an estimate of their possibilities that their immense value as a major surprise that might have ended the war, was altogether wasted. Later some were bogged



in Flanders mud, to the great delight of the contemporary military mind.

To the very end of the war not one of all the generals who prance across the page of history developed the ability to handle the vast armies and mechanisms under his nominal control. Nor was any flexible and effective method of collaboration ever brought into being. The Great War was an All Fools' War. But there was no admission of this fact. The system just went on with the senseless slaughter until discipline dissolved, first in Russia and then—luckily for us and the immobilized French—in Germany. And instantly upon the German collapse our populace forgot its gathering doubts.

Girls, children, women, schoolboys, undergraduates, unfit, middle-aged and elderly men, thronged the streets rejoicing; glad that the national martyrdom was over. There were a million of us dead of course, and half of those deaths, even from the military point of view had been sheer waste, but after all *we* had won.

I remember starting out with Jane during one of these pompous, swarming occasions to get from our flat in Whitehall Court to Liverpool Street Station and so escape to our home at Easton Glebe. Our cab was held up and we had to abandon it and struggle with our bags through the press as well as we could. We squeezed through at last and caught a later train than we intended. It was one of those occasions when my love for my fellow man deserts me.

'And this', thought I, 'is the reality of democracy. This is the real people. This seething multitude of vague kindly uncritical brains is the stuff we count upon to direct the novel and complex organization of a better world!'

The thought suddenly made me laugh aloud, and after that it was easier to push along and help steer Jane through the crowd about the Royal Exchange. . . .



## CHAPTER XXI

### WORLD EDUCATION

My awakening to the realities of 1919 was fairly rapid. At first I found it difficult to express my indignant astonishment at the Peace League that was being thrust upon Europe. I clung to the original demands and promises of the League of Nations Union. My futile voice mingled feebly with the feeble protests of a few other intelligent men behind the scenes while the conference rooms reverberated to the feet of the 'statesmen' and the pompous expressions of their 'policies'.

During the various discussions, committee meetings and conferences that occurred in the earlier League of Nations organizations, I had been very much impressed by the fact that everyone seemed to have read a different piece of history or no history at all, and that consequently our ideas of the methods and possibilities of human association varied in the wildest manner. The curious fact dawned upon me that I had a much broader grasp of historical reality than most of my associates in this mixture of minds which, as the League of Nations Union, was trying to fuse itself into a directive and controlling public opinion. I began to talk more and more decisively of the need for 'general history' and to express opinions such as I embodied finally in a pamphlet *History is One* (1919). I proposed that our Research Committee should organize the writing and publication of a history of mankind which should show plainly to the general intelligence how inevitable, if civilization was to continue, was the growth of political, social and economic organizations into a world federation.

My idea was at first an outline of history beginning with an account of the Roman and Chinese empires at the Christian era, and coming up to contemporary conditions.



But it became very speedily plain to me that no such broad but compact historical treatment by historians was possible. They would not dare to do anything so large, for fear of incidental slips and errors. They were unused to any effective co-operation and their disposition would be all towards binding together a lot of little histories by different hands, and calling the binding a synthesis; and even if they could be persuaded to do anything of the sort it would certainly be years before it became available. I was already making a note-book for my own enjoyment and for use in the controversies that I felt were gathering ahead, and the idea of writing up this note-book of how the present human situation had come about and publishing it became more and more attractive.

It did not occur to me that this Note-book or Outline of History would be a particularly saleable production. I wanted to sketch out how the job might be done rather than to do it. Before I began it I had a very serious talk with my wife about our financial position. The little parcel of securities we had accumulated before 1914 had been badly damaged by the war. Its value had fallen from about £20,000 to less than half that amount. But my position as a journalist had improved. We decided that I could afford a year's hard work on this précis of history, although it might bring in very little. I set to work with the *Encyclopædia Britannica* at my elbow, to get the general shape of history sketched out. It planned itself naturally enough as a story of communications and increasing interdependence. It became an essay on the growth of association since the dawn of animal communities. Its beginning was carried right back to those reptiles which shelter their eggs and protect their offspring, and it came on in one story of expanding relationship to the aeroplane-radio-linked human world of today. The essay grew beyond expectation, but that stress upon continually more effective communications



is still, as even the reader of the *Outline's* List of Contents can see, the gist of it all.

I will not here detail how with the *Outline*, as with *Anticipations*, my sense of the importance of my subject grew as I worked upon it. I saw more and more plainly that this was the form, the only right form, in which history should be presented to the ordinary citizen of the modern state, this, and not 'King and Country' stuff, was the history needed for general education, and I realized too that even my arrangement of notes, if it was properly 'vetted' by one or two more specialized and authoritative helpers, might be made to serve, provisionally at least, for just that general review of reality of which we stood in such manifest need if any permanent political unity was to be sustained in the world. I persuaded Sir Ray Lankester, Sir Harry Johnston, Gilbert Murray, Mr Ernest Barker, Sir Denison Ross, Philip Guedalla and various other men of knowledge among my friends, to go over my typescript for me; I got J. F. Horrabin, who makes charts that talk, to help me with some exceptionally eloquent maps, and I suggested to Newnes & Co. the possibility of a publication in parts prior to the publication of the *Outline* in book form by Cassells. In America, Mr G. P. Brett of the Macmillan Company was very doubtful about the prospects of the book, but finally he brought it out at the rather odd price of 10 dollars and 10 cents.

The public response was unexpectedly vigorous, both in Britain and America. Edition after edition was sold on both sides of the Atlantic. It made a new and wider reputation for me and earned me a considerable sum of money. Over two million copies of the *Outline* in English have been sold since 1919, it has been translated into most literary languages, and it continues to sell widely. *A Short History of the World* (1922) has also had an extensive sale. The ordinary man had been stimulated to a real



curiosity about the human past ; he wanted to be told the story of the planet and of the race, plainly and credibly, and since the ' historians ' would not or could not do it, he turned to my book. It was quite open to those worthy teachers to do the job over again and do it beyond measure better, but until they could manage to do that, people had either to remain in ignorance of this exciting subject, as one whole, or else go on reading me, or some other outsider.

The immense popularity of the *Outline of History* was a very exciting success for me. My self-conceit has always had great recuperative power ; it revived bravely now ; and I saw a still wider possibility behind the *Outline*, the possibility of giving Mr Everyman an account not merely of past events, but of the main facts about the processes of life in general and the social, economic and political state of the world.

I developed a scheme which I called the ' Book of Necessary Knowledge ' or the ' Bible of Civilization '.

I should have liked to call these books that were taking shape in my mind an *Outline of Biology* and an *Outline of Social and Economic Science*. But following the success of the *Outline of History* a number of so-called ' Outlines ' of Art—of Literature—of Science—of this and that, had been put upon the market and widely advertised and distributed. They were not really outlines at all ; they were articles by various hands with hardly any common thread of interest, but they exhausted the meaning of the word so completely that when at last after much toil and tribulation I got the books I wanted done, I called them *The Science of Life* and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* respectively.

In organizing the writing of the *Science of Life* I was greatly helped by my early association with biological work and by the facts that my eldest son was a biological teacher and that the able grandson of my teacher Huxley, Julian Huxley, was my friend. He has an extraordinary



full and detailed knowledge of the whole biological field. We three got together in 1927 and we made a scheme that covered every division of our immense subject. We worked very harmoniously throughout and produced the book in 1930.

I had already been casting about for suitable helpers to collaborate in the same fashion upon a summary of social, political and economic science, but in this I was less successful.

In the end I brought in a number of advisers and helpers and did the *Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* as I had done the *Outline of History* by writing or rewriting practically all of it myself, and then getting the various parts vetted and revised and, in one part, rewritten by specialists. It appeared in 1931 and it has sold very well, but not at all on the scale of the *Outline of History*. On the whole, considering the greater novelty of the design, I am quite as well satisfied with it as I am with its two companions.

These three works taken together do, I believe, still give a clearer, fuller and compacter summary of what the normal citizen of the modern state should know, than any other group of books in existence. They shape out something that will presently be better done.

But I am not writing a history of modern ideas in the world. I am writing the story of modern ideas in the mind of one sample person, H. G. Wells.

And as I look at the table in my study piled up with my books I am quite unable to make up my mind how far these millions of printed words are already dead litter and how much is still touching and moving minds. Is all this, and the kindred stuff of similar writers, producing any sensible and permanent effect upon the world? Much of it has certainly failed, because it was written hastily or just badly, because it was directed at the wrong brains. But is it mostly going to be missed? Never



in this world will it be possible to make a just estimate of what it has done.

There is a queer little twist in my private vanity, a streak of snobbish imitativeness, which disposes me at times to parallel my lot with Roger Bacon's. This disposition is in evidence in the opening chapter of *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*. When I am most oppressed by the apparent lack of direct consequence to all my voluminous efforts, then it is most comforting to me to compare myself with Bacon in his cell scribbling away at those long dissertations of his about a new method of knowledge, which never even reached, much less influenced, the one sole reader, his friend the Pope, in whom he had hope for the realization of his dream. Which nevertheless in the course of a few centuries came to the fullest fruition. I play at being such a man as he was, a man altogether lonely and immediately futile, a man lit by a vision of a world still some centuries ahead, convinced of its reality and urgency, and yet powerless to bring it nearer.

But this is just an imaginative indulgence, a private vice I nurse, and directly I set it down here in plain black and white its absurd unreasonableness is plain. In truth I am neither solitary nor suppressed. I merely happen to be the one I know best among a number of people who are all thinking very closely upon the same lines. Instead of writing manuscripts that will rest unread or be merely glanced at for centuries, we are printing and scattering our ideas by the million copies.

As I write here there must be between two and three million copies of my own books scattered about the world, and many more millions of other books and newspaper articles, lectures and discourses by other hands, all driving in the same direction. Every day several thousands of fresh minds respond to some part of the suggestions we are making ; a teacher here alters his teaching a little ;



a reader thinks over a point and argues with his friend ; a journalist gets a new idea of things and echoes it in an article.

There is no proof that the seed we have already sown has died. On the contrary, the signs of vitality increase. Now it is a series of lessons in some elementary school ; now it is a string of broadcast talks ; now it is a book for children or the newspaper report of a provincial lecture, that comes reassuringly, another fresh green blade forcing its way to the light. The new ideas creep upon the world *now*. The thoughts of Roger Bacon were like a dream that comes before dawn and is almost forgotten again. The sleeper turns over and sleeps on. All that Roger Bacon wrote was like humanity talking in its sleep. What is happening now is by comparison an awakening.

I have remarked elsewhere upon the fugitive element in most intellectual lives, but it is only now as I bring facts and dates together that I realize the importance of fugitive impulses throughout my own story. At phase after phase I find myself saying in effect : ' I must get out of this. I must get clear. I must get away from all this and think and then begin again. These daily routines are wrapping about me. I must have the refreshment of new sights, sounds, colours or I shall die away.'

My revolt against the draper's shop was the first appearance of this mood. It was a flight—to a dream of happy learning and teaching in poverty. I detect all the symptoms of the same flight impulse again about 1909. We shifted house from Sandgate to London (1909) and from London to Easton Glebe (1910) and there I settled down again. The huge issues of the War and the Peace held my mind steady and kept it busy for some years. But in 1924 the same mood returned, so recognizably the same, that I am surprised to realize how little



I apprehended the connexion at the time. I got to the south of France. My wife perceived that I was in grave mental distress and understood how things were with me. I did not immediately head for France. I went by air first to the Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva with the idea of going on thence to wander round the world. It was at Geneva that I changed my plans and turned southward. I found it was quite possible to get out of things, for some months at least, establish myself in a quiet corner among the hills, stay there cut off from the daily urgencies of England, sift my thoughts and purposes in peace and presently write.

I began a life in duplicate. The main current of my outward life still flowed through my home at Little Easton in Essex; there the mass of my correspondence was dealt with and all my business done, but in the south of France I dramatized myself as William Clissold, an industrialist in retreat, and I set this Mr William Clissold to survey and think out how the world\* looked to him. For three winters I lived intermittently in that pleasant sunlit corner, living very plainly and simply, sitting about in the sun, strolling on the flowery olive terraces about me, going for long walks among the hills behind.

I wish that seasonal retirement to the warm south could have gone on to the end, but difficulties and complications—a craving for an efficient bathroom, electric light and a small car, it may be—presently undid me. I attempted to reproduce my French house on a firmer foundation and behold! the foundation became a pitfall. I began to play with house-building and garden-planning. Men and women take to building and gardening in order to distract their minds from the whole round world and its claim upon them. I acquired some land with a pretty rock, vines, jasmin and a stream close by, and I planned and built a house which I called Lou Pidou, and after that rash act the cares of house-holding and car-owning



and gardening began to grow up about me. I worked there with dwindling zest and energy and stayed less and less willingly and for briefer periods, as those good long sunlit hours in which I could think became rare and ragged and the necessity for management and attention more clamorous, until presently a time came, in May 1933, when I realized I could work there effectively no more.

It was early in 1933 that the opening section of this autobiography was written. I cast Lou Pidou at last as a snake casts its skin. It needed an effort, but once more the liberating impulse was the stronger. I resolved that I would sell it, or if necessary give it away, and have done with it. I took a farewell stroll in my olive orchard up the hill, said goodbye to my new and promising orange trees and rose beds, to the weeping willows and the banks of iris I had planted by my stream, sat for a while on my terrace with a grave black cat beside me, to which I was much attached, and then went down the familiar road to Cannes station for the last time.

I returned to London.

My flat in London is now my only home. The family I spoke of at the beginning of Chapter XIX turned out to be two small boys who are parents today with pleasant households and sons and daughters of their own, and Easton Glebe was sold after my wife's death in 1927. It had become too large for me and too empty altogether. I have indeed seen family life right round now from beginning to end. That stage is over. A flat above the rumble of Baker Street and Marylebone Road is as good a place as any to work in and easy to maintain; I can go away when I please and where I please for as long as I please; and London is a very friendly and pleasant city to me. If I have no garden of my own, Regent's Park just outside my door grows prettier every year; there are no gardens like Kew Gardens and no more agreeable people in the world than the people in the London streets.



# QUESTIONS

## CHAPTER I

1. Describe in your own words the house in which the author was born.
2. Describe in your own words the yard in which he played.
3. What do we learn about the neighbours of the Wells family in this chapter?
4. What useful words have you added to your vocabulary in reading this chapter?

## CHAPTER II

1. Reading Wells reminds us of our own early reading. Write the story of how you began to read and enjoy books.
2. If you had to stay in bed for six weeks, what would you read? Give the reasons for your choice.
3. What is this theory of evolution about which Wells talks?
4. Define the following words: *consuming*, *impassive*, *wary*, *imagination*, *carnivores*.

## CHAPTER III

1. Write a short speech on the subject 'A nation with many illiterates would compete at a disadvantage against the foreigner'.
2. Describe the school in any village you know; or, describe a primary school.
3. Write a short essay on the advantages of education to the individual.
4. What did Wells learn at Mr Morley's school?

## CHAPTER IV

1. What do we learn of a housekeeper's duties in this chapter?
2. Name the members of the Wells family and describe their occupation.
3. What is a figure of speech? Give an example from this chapter.

## CHAPTER V

1. Describe Wells's daily duties in the drapery store.
2. Describe fully how he failed.
3. What relations did he have at Surly Hall?
4. Describe living conditions in the drapery store.



## CHAPTER VI

1. This book is the story of the growth of a brain. What did the brain learn in this chapter?
2. What do we learn about Uncle Williams?

## CHAPTER VII

1. What is Wells's defence of written examinations? Can you add other arguments in its favour?
2. Write a description of a typical modern chemist's shop.
3. Why did Wells like working in a chemist's shop?
4. Why did he leave the shop?

## CHAPTER VIII

1. Describe Wells's day in Mr Hyde's shop.
2. What does Wells have to say about the retail distributing trade in modern states?
3. How and why did Wells leave Mr Hyde's shop?
4. What were the two guiding principles of Wells's life at this time and what can be said for them?

## CHAPTER IX

1. We can fairly say that this fifth start was not a false start. Why?
2. Describe fully why Wells was important to Mr Byatt as a student.
3. What have we learned of Mr Byatt's appearance, character and background?
4. Why is Mrs Walton such a charming character?

## CHAPTER X

1. What do we learn of the teaching methods of Huxley and Howes?
2. Tell in your own words what Wells has to say about the greatness of Huxley and Darwin.
3. How did Guthrie and Boys compare as teachers?
4. What does Wells have to say about the study of Physics?
5. Record briefly Wells's experiences as a third-year student.
6. Who was Wells's favourite teacher at Kensington, and why?
7. What did Wells think of the various subjects he studied at the Science School?



## CHAPTER XI

1. Write a brief essay on the relation between body and brain.
2. What references have we had so far to the possibility of Wells becoming a writer?
3. How many facts do we learn in this chapter about the Holt Academy and what are they?
4. Under what circumstances did Wells leave the Holt Academy?

## CHAPTER XII

1. What sort of lodgings did Wells now get?
2. What impression do you get here of London streets and shops?
3. Who was Jennings and what was he like?
4. How did Wells add to his weekly budget?

## CHAPTER XIII

1. Describe carefully the buildings of Henley House School.
2. In what way did Wells decide to teach science and why?
3. What happened when the Frenchman tried to produce oxygen?

## CHAPTER XIV

1. What arrangements did Wells make now with Milne?
2. What arrangements did Wells make with Briggs?
3. What kind of writing did Wells do now?

## CHAPTER XV

1. What was the attitude of Wells and Low to the society around them?
2. Wells later became full of humour. What humorous object is described in this chapter and why was it funny?
3. What sort of writing did Wells return to immediately after the Harris failure?
4. What sort of writing did Wells do for the *Pall Mall Gazette*?

## CHAPTER XVI

1. What factors helped English writers in the last decade of the nineteenth century?
2. Describe Wells's married life in your own words.
3. What was the result of Wells's visit to Cust?
4. What subjects did Wells have for his short stories?



## CHAPTER XVII

1. We have a few hints as to what the serial story was about—what do you think it was about?
2. What paper was Harris editing now and what was his policy?
3. Write a brief description of Henley *or* Harris.
4. What was the difference in background between Wells and Shaw?

## CHAPTER XVIII

1. What sort of books was Wells now writing and what did he make from his writings?
2. What happened when they went on a cycling tour?
3. When Wells was sick he was visited by three famous literary men. Why did they come? What did their visit imply about his writing?

## CHAPTER XIX

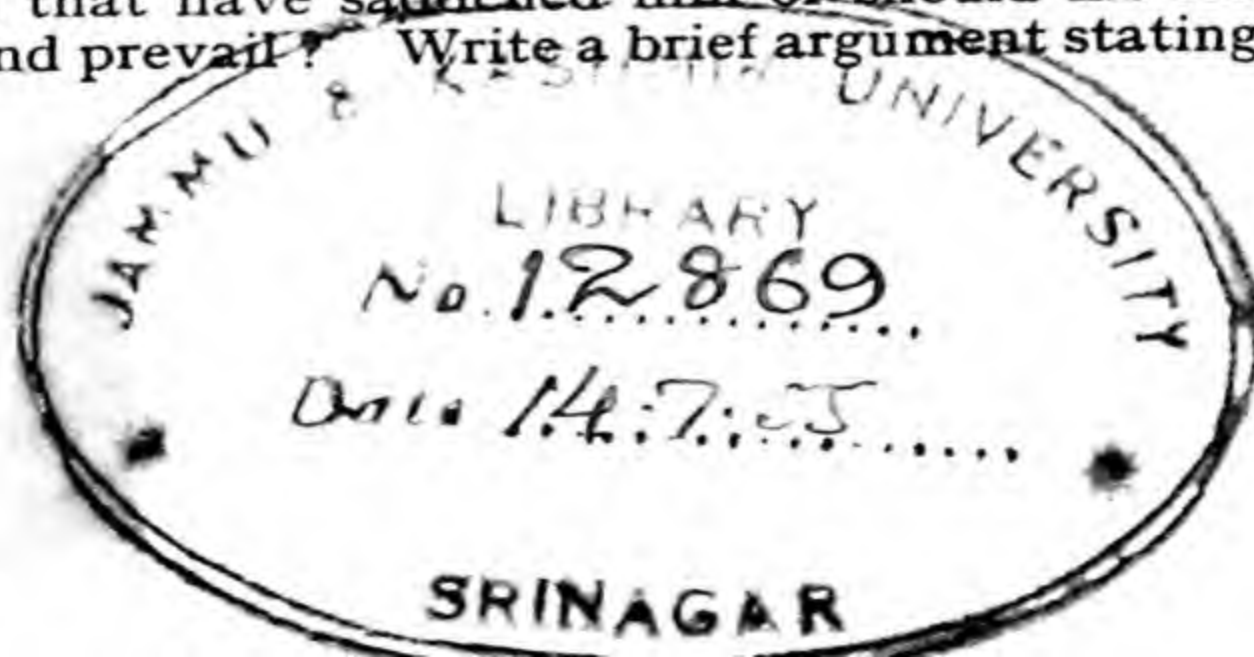
1. Describe Spade House.
2. What did Wells try to do in his book *Anticipations*?
3. Again Wells talks about the nature of this autobiography. What is its nature?

## CHAPTER XX

1. Who were the main combatants in the Great War of 1914-18?
2. How was the war mainly fought and what did Wells think of the generals on both sides?
3. Wells was always writing books to help humanity to progress; but what did he think of humanity at the end of this chapter?
4. Write a brief description of your own Ideal State.

## CHAPTER XXI

1. What was Wells's contribution to human progress in the years immediately after the war?
2. Why did he write about science and who wrote his books with him?
3. What was his faith in the power of books as expressed here?
4. Wells lived to see another terrible war, the one you have lived through. Should that have ~~saddened him or~~ should his ideas for the progress of mankind prevail? Write a brief argument stating your own belief.









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